

KNOWLEDGE AND LIFE

WILLIAM
ARKWRIGHT



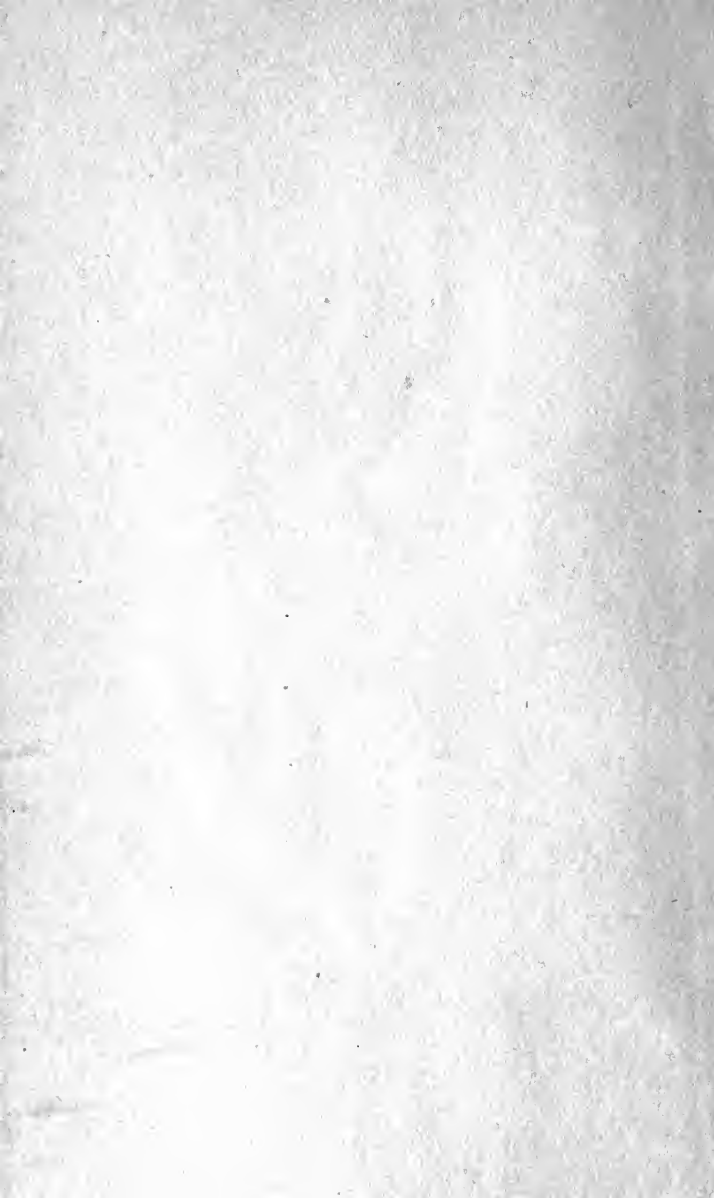
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KNOWLEDGE AND LIFE

KNOWLEDGE AND LIFE BY WILLIAM ARKWRIGHT

“Of the three cardinal sins in Buddhism
(râga, dosa, moha) the last and worst
is stupidity or dullness, the others
being sensuality and ill-will”—

Early Buddhism by RHYS DAVIDS

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To H. J. P.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

TWO of these pieces, "A Ligurian Paradise" and "An Appreciation," originally appeared in the *Morning Post*, and to the courtesy of its Proprietor the author is indebted for permission to publish them.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE	13
THE THIEF	27
THE ANT'S FIRST STORY	35
THE BAMBINO	47
AN IMPRESSION OF WESTMINSTER	59
THE ANT'S SECOND STORY	73
THE COCK CHAFFINCH	87
UNAWARES	97
AGNI	107
THE ANT'S LAST STORY	121
A LIGURIAN PARADISE	131
BONA MORS	139
TREASURE TROVE	147
AN APPRECIATION	157
LONELINESS	169
FROM AN OLD DIARY	181
KAIRWAN	195
THE TREE OF LIFE	207

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

THE primeval struggles of humanity to obtain civilization have been symbolized in the mythologies of many nations—most poetically perhaps among the Greeks, whose hero stole fire from heaven, but most explicitly in the Jewish version where the protagonists exploited a tree of knowledge.

In the Old Testament, the familiar parable of the Garden of Eden has been treated artlessly yet with conviction, so that from the finite behaviour of the characters human, divine, ophidian, the story actually gains effectiveness. In it, of course, Jehovah is by no means made to play the part of vindictive tyrant that professional interpreters have been inclined to assign to him ; he is, on the contrary, a hasty, jealous, but essentially kind-hearted deity of the traditional type.

Apparently it has been the aim of the

theologians, by embroidering the text with far-fetched meanings, to represent him as a demon unjustly punishing disobedience, before that sin, or indeed any of the sins, had crystallized—in other words, before the raiding of the Tree of Knowledge had introduced this sin of disobedience into the scheme of man's possibilities. Even "in the beginning," however, it is plain that bogey was rather a favourite with the Cloth—an effective shepherd's dog for the subjugation of unruly flocks.

But that the original version was innocent of such illogicality seems evident from the homely account in the Book of Genesis ; where the first speech of the Almighty to Adam concerning the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil reads as follows : " Thou shalt not eat of it ; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Manifestly such a sentence, even snatched from its context, is not of necessity a threatful command ! On the contrary, it savours more of a warning against the Tree, because of its inherently dangerous qualities. And this view was certainly shared by Eve ;

since during her conversation on the subject with the Serpent, she actually quoted the Lord's own words as having been "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, *lest ye die.*"

The Serpent, we read, scouted this prediction ; and by his comment that God did not wish Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit because by so doing their eyes would be opened and they would be "as gods," he introduced the suggestion of an ulterior motive ; and it is certainly startling to find in the sequel that his statement was as correct as his insinuation was justified. For not only did the venturesome pair survive the eating of that fruit, but also, though Jehovah was very angry with them for having ignored his warning, his indignation, as he himself confessed later, was mainly due to the very reasons that the Serpent had outlined. The Biblical account, moreover, makes it clear that the expulsion of the culprits from Eden was for the purpose of protecting the Tree of Life from their possible depredation—not to punish them for disobedience ; and Jehovah's wrath must have been easily appeased, or

he would not himself have made "coats of skin and clothed them."

It is noteworthy, in this connection, that the tasting of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was not supposed to give to our first parents any perception of the advantage to be gained by a prompt seizure on the Tree of Life, or indeed to have brought them immediate decision of any kind, as they frittered away invaluable opportunity in sewing fig-leaves and making aprons—a cynical touch to underline, as it were, the consequences of feminine interference in matters of importance.

Simultaneously with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, the Tree of Knowledge abruptly disappears from Hebrew legend; but transplanted from romance into actuality, it flourished exceedingly. The stupefying effect of the fruit on primal innocence was succeeded by an increasing stimulation in every province of practical sapience; although the benefactions of civilization seem to have been always limited to mundane matters, to material life.

But in spite of these restrictions, the Tree of Knowledge is a splendid inheritance and, anyhow for the time being, its advantages completely eclipse the unsubstantial mysteries of the Tree of Life ; so that, though man's contentment only persists in inverse proportion to his consumption of its fruit, none but a fool could to-day deny that the possession of knowledge was worth its price, and none but a hypocrite could affect to reproach Mother Eve and the Serpent for their master-stroke.

Obviously the fruit of this tree of civilization is a symbol of education ; and as such, its curious mixture of good and evil is assimilable by mankind either in an uncooked state, or in various condensations. Even the dogs thrive by feeding on the scraps and leavings ; and if they manage in this way to pick up an undue share of the knowledge of good, it is probably owing to the fact that the good is not necessarily the more pleasant to the human palate.

In times gone by, when individual exertion was involved in the gathering of the fruit, only a sufficiency for immediate con-

sumption could be obtained : it was, therefore, wholesome and full of flavour. But nowadays there is running through the multitude a sort of mania for repletion, to satisfy which the Tree has been forced injudiciously, and its produce has deteriorated on account of this excessive cropping—in short, quality has been sacrificed to quantity, the attainment of wisdom to the acquisition of learning. Factories have been established everywhere for the purpose of pulping and boiling down educational matter into books and similar patent preparations ; and, although the salutary carbo-hydrates of reflection and practice evaporate from the mess during this cooking process, it is nevertheless crammed by law down the throats of the children for their daily food, in defiance of epidemic visitations of indigestion and surfeit—evils that might be expected to result from a highly concentrated diet in tablet form.

Fortunately, however, there is one exceptional conserve that retains the flavour, the volatile juices, the essence of the natural fruit, for which it seems actually to engender

a preference ; and this book has been named Dictionary, of the genus encyclopædia. Talk of the hundred best books, there is but one ! The dictionary holds in solution among its cryptic pages all Shakespeare, all the Bible, all science, the lore of the ages, every thought and every imagining of men. Nay ! it alone would outweigh the loss of paradise !

I have by my side, at the present moment, a transatlantic specimen, which is so unearthly in its acumen that, by means of letterpress and picture, it contrives to make intelligible all that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth—except, perhaps, the true proportion of things American, and the intricacies of English orthography.

At best, however, education is only the nurse of mankind's abstract qualities, which it is capable of guiding, occasionally of shaping, but never of begetting ; for the generation of these qualities is the function of a universal law.

Æons before reason had quickened in the mind of man, ages before the species itself had developed, millenniums before the very

Earth had consolidated, a duadic power, unconscious yet irresistible, was evolving little by little, until it dominated the whole realm of Nature, and created even the abstractions. This energy is the law of Sex: the working of which among sentient beings is self-evident, although in its more complex relationships the necessity of such an element seems to have escaped the attention of minds preoccupied with the humdrum of life.

The cosmogonies of the Hindu Vedas and of the Mosaic Genesis proclaim this principle, through the mystical blending of the Spirit of God with Chaos; while the immortal Theogony of Hesiod is entirely based on sexual imagery.

At the application of this law to the realm of literature, serious checks, which threaten to limit the production of masterpieces at the present day, manifest themselves immediately. A frequent sterility of the male principle is evidenced by the moth-plumes of formless fancies, too fragile for condensation, floating in their myriads through the brain; whereas Idea to be of

any creative value must be both definite and insistent. A true gem will stand polishing, even grinding; and the kingfisher's nest loses interest in our eyes, because for all its symmetry it will not bear translation.

Another disquieting phenomenon of to-day is the superabundance of the feminine ingredient—so much more of vocabulary than notion, of diction than concept; for which a probable reason may be found in a comparison with the discoveries of physiology. For as in this science Professor Geddes has voiced the conclusion of numerous investigators that “favourable nutritive conditions tend to produce females,” so by analogy it may be inferred that the liberal pabulum of manuals and primers now in vogue is responsible for a similar overplus in the world of letters. Again, as “in prosperity of summer” the female green-flies, without male assistance, produce an ephemeral offspring, so from a redundant curriculum do parthenogenetic writings make their appearance in greater numbers than those that are legitimately begotten. Wherefore, doubtless, each callow

aspirant nowadays possesses droves of ostentatious phrases, and is waiting for thoughts with which to fertilize them—only as a rule he tires of waiting, and rushes into print.

But the mighty law of Sex is not to be turned aside by modern accidents ; it will continue to achieve !

There shall still be engendered original idea, to mate with language of a quality reminiscent of the moonlight rather than the mist, of a halo rather than a fig-leaf : language glowing with lustres rather than dazzling by flashes, since to startle is also to displease : language inexorably banishing from its sentences the incongruous word which grates like the squeak of a slate-pencil, which jars like a stone in the plum-cake.

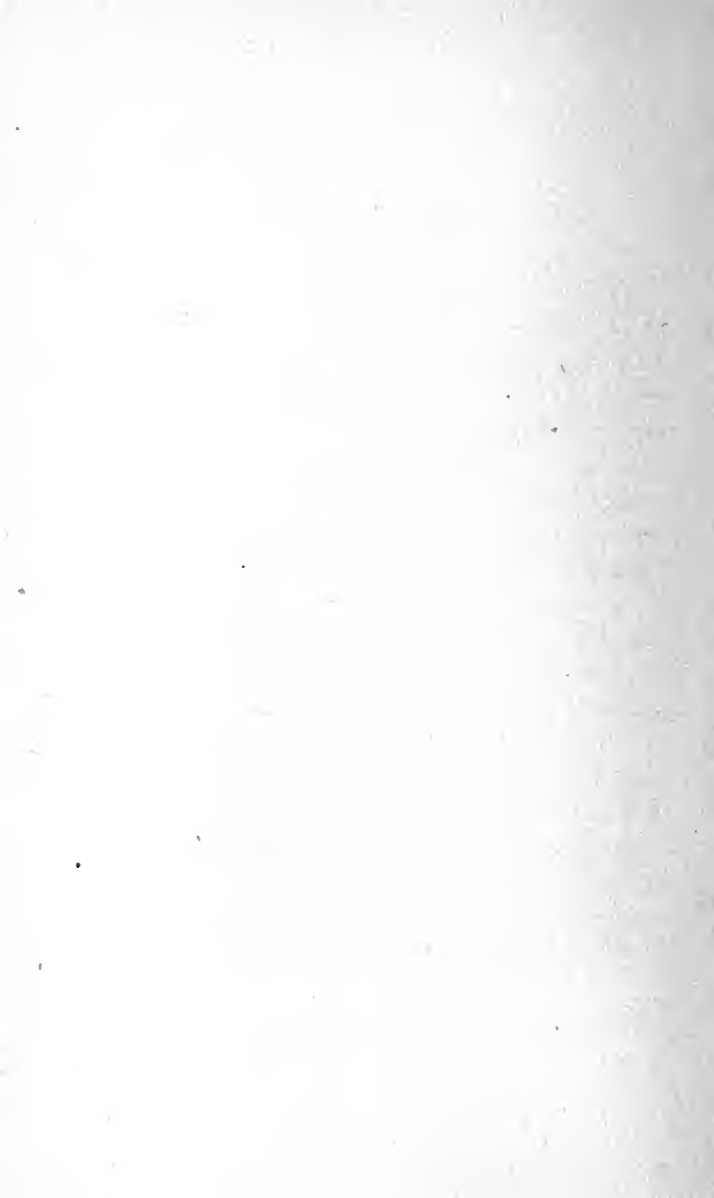
Of such an auspicious embrace must be born Style, the enchantress, whose glamour can gild the edges of the commonplace and print its titles in amaranth—whose charms may one day entice from the empyrean, as formerly the daughters of men did entice the sons of God, that spirit of the green flame, by name Inspiration.

Thus apparently by chance, of no preconcerted congruity, shall Genius, the sublime arise. Concentration of intellectual magic, it resembles electricity in its omnipresence, though unique in its defiance of formula ; and, being a hybrid, of mixed race, it is both sexless and of twofold impulse—ever whirling, fluctuating, vacillating between earth and heaven.

In the pursuit of truth, I may have wandered somewhat from the ovine line of way of the Ninety-and-nine ; but Spenser's noble apology for an allegory will perhaps avail mine also : " The general end of all the booke, is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline."



THE THIEF



THE THIEF

HE was the dearly loved child of a young widow, who herself had been educated (alas !) in that school of Calvinistic savagery which always assures to its adherents a sense of infallibility of judgment.

He was scarcely six years old, a chubby, cheery little mortal—with one of those pure souls that are still fragrant of paradise. His faith was simple and intuitive—he believed in God and in his own mother, and he loved them equally. In fact, to his mind, God and Mother were ideas mystically blended together. At any rate, he would have placed Mother infinitely higher than the Blessed Virgin—even without the constant dinning into his ears that Mary was a mere woman, which he was confident that his mother was not ! He had, of course, heard much of the sinfulness of little children, and of the “ chains, and fire, and gloom ” in store for

such on the slightest provocation ; but these frenzied prognostications had slipped easily from his mind, like the water from the proverbial duck's back, leaving only fixed there as an axiom, that grown-up people, in contradistinction to the young, could not sin—could not even err !

Sin, however, had little interest for him, probably because it also lacked fascination, but naturally at that time of his life he was neither analytical nor introspective ; and though he had, as the nurses say, “ a sweet tooth,” there was always left unguarded on the sideboard of the dining-room a bowl of powdered sugar which he used to pass without a feeling of temptation, though fully alive to its potentialities of bliss.

There was to be a children's party at the vicarage ; and to this he had been looking forward with anticipations such as only childhood can conjure up. It was his first regular party, and he felt his joy mingled with elation at being so “ grown-up.” The eventful evening at last arrived, and proved entrancing beyond the power of words ! The eldest son of the house (a big boy !) even

condescended to play with him : and they were hiding by turns from each other a tiny, wooden poodle, when a cry of " Magic-lantern in the dining-room ! " arose, at which summons away they skeltered, the wooden dog being completely forgotten in the new excitement. Oh ! those pictures on the sheet in the mysteriously darkened room, how he laughed, and crowed, and laughed again ! He had almost to be carried home that night, and then Nurse had to be told all about it ; and for long enough he *couldn't* get to sleep, because just when he was dropping off, a scud of laughter came to stir him again.

Merriment, however, is on occasion as good as sleep, and next morning after his breakfast he danced down to the drawing-room as usual, to see his mother.

She was standing with her back to the door, and as she slowly confronted him, he saw that her face was distorted, her eyes strangely gleaming. In a hoarse, choking voice she told him flatly that he was a thief, and no child of hers ; but it was only by degrees that he could understand that he

was accused of having stolen the wooden poodle, which the nurse had found in his jacket-pocket. For the moment, he was unable to remember how it had got there, but he stoutly protested his innocence. In vain, in vain ! The toy had been found in his pocket : he only made matters far worse by lying about it. Clearly he was a thief. I swear that from his misery he cried out, not from the pain of that rough grasp, not from the stunning blow on his ear : so when in escaping from the room he fell over Jet, the big retriever, he lay there sobbing with his eyes shut, while the old dog licked his face.

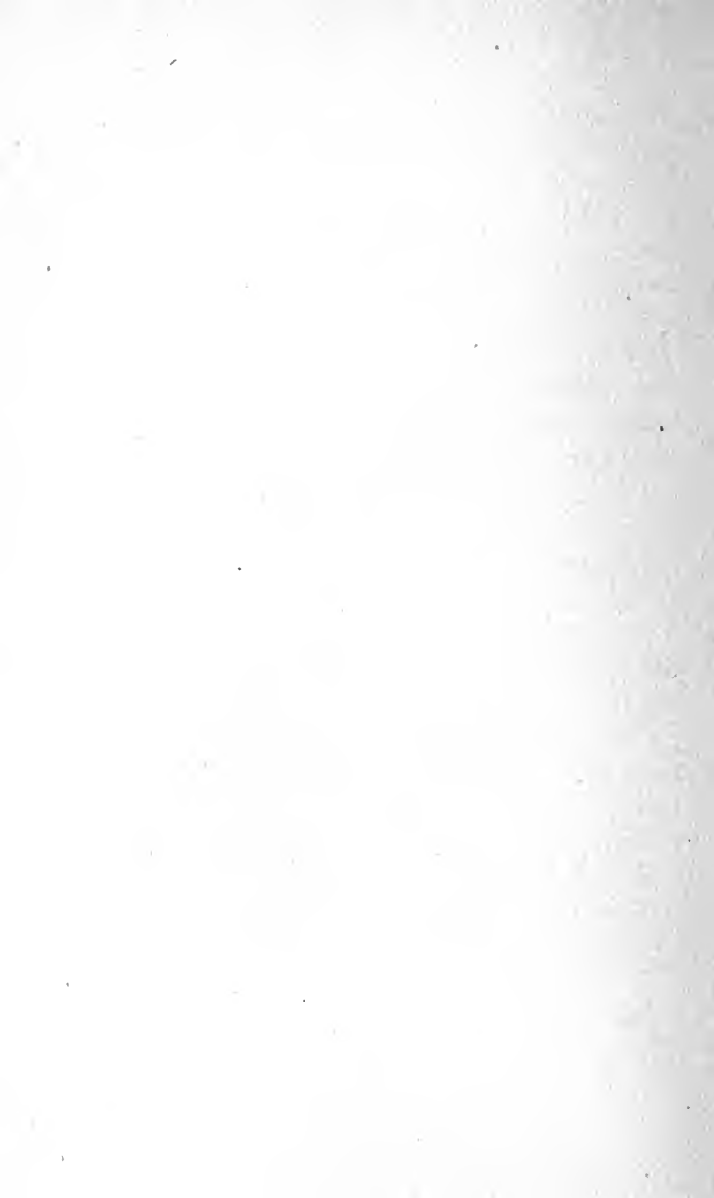
In the afternoon the destined punishment was duly executed. It was—that the culprit should walk through the village to the vicarage, with the word “ THIEF ” in huge letters, fastened on his back, thus to restore the plaything to its rightful owners. Try to imagine the agony that all this meant to a sensitive child—almost a baby—certain that the whole world would read the wicked placard, and would believe it, that in consequence no one would ever trust him again, no one forget such an awful, such a mean crime !

The lying notice was duly produced, it was pinned to his back, and amid struggling and shrieking he was dragged by his mother down the long street.

I hardly know what happened at the vicarage. Bruised, cowed, collapsed, he of course said in the end whatever they wanted, which, I suppose, included some kind of confession, for he was dimly conscious of the shocked voice of the vicar's wife raised in suitable homily. But I do know for certain that as he stumbled homewards he felt the Devil lift the false motto from his shoulders, only to replace it with another one branded through with red-hot lettering : " LIAR, MINE."

Overthrown, from that day forth, were the old Faith, the old Mother, the old God—not for a week : not for a year : not for his youth : but for ever—and the lees of those tears still stagnate round his heart, after half a century.

Fifty years ago. . . . Ah, well ! let us hope that the powdered sugar afforded some temporary consolation !



THE ANT'S FIRST STORY

THE ANT'S FIRST STORY

CLEVER men have always taken a special interest in us, probably from a superficial resemblance between the formic character and the human, which, of course, one finds impossible to repudiate. And undoubtedly they have discovered not a little about our life ; while we on our side have investigated their institutions with success still more conspicuous. Although Solomon, their greatest sage, urged on them to " go to the Ant, consider her ways and be wise," they, as is their custom, dallied over the counsel : at any rate, *consideration* of our ways would hardly be an appropriate term by which to characterize sundry wild shots at our history, hazarded from time to time by various authors.

But after about three thousand years, a certain Sir John Lubbock published a monograph on our civilization, the result of really

minute investigation. His book, perhaps a little too intimate for the canons of strict taste, was chiefly occupied with a recital of the commonplaces of our domestic economy—but it fairly astounded the British public. Since that time I understand that two French astronomers, the Henry Brothers, have discovered that ants can perceive certain rays of light that are invisible to the denser senses of mankind: and indeed, it is this faculty that enables me to recount, as an experience of my own, a story that may enhance our potentialities in the estimation of anthropoid readers.

One summer evening, on happening to glance at an angel slowly sailing up the valley, I was fascinated by the colour of his wings which were literally like the coming of the dawn. And altogether, he looked so gorgeous, such a dazzling embodiment of the ultra-violet ray, that partly from admiration, partly from curiosity, I felt impelled to follow him. So I spread my own wings in pursuit.

Evidently attracted by the sound of music from within, he hovered for a moment

over the cathedral of our quiet city, alighted near its porch, and entered at the open door. The scene inside was simple and impressive. In the centre under an immense chandelier reposed the sacred book on the back of a brazen eagle : but, at the moment, bibliolatry was not much in evidence, as the congregation was seated to enjoy the relaxation of the anthem, a device for showing off the excellence of the singing. " The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light," boomed out from the massive throat of the bass singer : " A great light," shrilled the trebles in melodious agreement. And then the full chorus took up the joyous burden. On the bosom of the great organ they tossed the words to and fro, plunging with them into the stream of the music and, so to speak, scattering the spray hither and thither in wildest abandon. But just as disaster seemed inevitable, the incipient discord became a divine plaint, and the storm was stilled and reconciled in a current of rarest harmony. A moment's pause ; and then arose the wonder of the ages, a voice all pearls and purity, that was carried effort-

less to the rafters. It sang of the Redeemer and of salvation, with inspired certainty: but to my consternation I found that it proceeded from a surpliced urchin, whom I had seen only a moment before nudging and laughing. How do the young rascals manage it? They fill the hearts of others with tears of repentance, and visions of the Almighty, while they themselves—oh well! I don't suppose that in reality they are half so conscientious as the average woman, despite the contrast of the voices. The reason may be that male emotionalism causes in boys a momentary loss of self-consciousness, such as the female can never know.

When I recovered from the effects of that solo, for I am ashamed to confess that even I was moved by it, I saw that the Angel was busy collecting impressions from the minds of the choir. I had lost both his questions and the answers, but I could see that he was dissatisfied. He next flitted, noiselessly as an owl at sundown, to the side of the white-robed clergyman lolling in a pinnacled stall, beneath a window dedicated to Mary, which concentrated its rubies at her peerless heart.

His reverence was listening to this exploitation of the Hebrew poesy with an air of semi-detached sanctity about his thin, wide mouth, not unmingled with the cultured approbation of the connoisseur—a model of cool propriety, whose only decoration proclaimed the university of Oxford. Again I missed the actual colloquy, amid the triumphant chords of the finale ; but the Angel, evidently hard to please, after a momentary investigation of the clerical conscience, took to flight, with a rustle that evoked from his victim such a shrug of petulant annoyance as can only be executed by the elderly, and that but at the suspicion of a draught.

Once outside the cathedral my pilot sprang into the twilight, like a pigeon released from a trap, and soared in circles above the houses as if exulting in freedom regained, but after a few dizzy pirouettes he was fluttering outside a broad window-sill, near which a lady sat at her writing-table. This time I happened to overhear his whisper, which she evidently mistook for the query of her own sub-consciousness : “ What of good have you accomplished ? ”

“Accomplished!” she repeated, and her demeanour somehow reminded me of that Bible-bearing eagle. “Why! my tongue is so glib, and my vocabulary so copious, that I can put anything into language. I can easily write thirty-five words a minute in slow long-hand. I have founded a religion. I am to be the saviour of my downtrodden sex! ‘Good,’ indeed!”

But the Angel smiled half ruefully, and we left her tapping at her typewriter.

He now flew straight away from the residential quarter, so we soon found ourselves in a shabby district where we chanced on the garret of a pale-faced man with a heavy brow and shadowy eyes, who was gazing into space, apparently at nothing at all. There was a sheet of paper in front of him, which glared at him pitilessly from the surrounding gloom: a blank, except for its scrawled heading of “The third and final Communion,” and for two or three brownish smudges of tears—or sweat. He still seemed to be in trouble, but his eyes were steady while he talked rapidly to himself.

“As our bodies are born of our mother’s

anguish so must our spirits be born of our own—yet happiness will be the final guerdon. Communion with Man is but the first step : his dogmas are largely speculative. Nature begins to instruct in her Communion at the point where Man's powers become exhausted; and she also has well-defined limits, on reaching which the soul is still unsatisfied and incomplete. Wonderment, not certainty, pervades Nature's realm—in the leaf as in the stars, in life as in death. She herself is always seeking for light, more light. How then can she expound the real in its totality? Besides, Nature with Man forms a dualism, a system that has proved fallacious in regard to the real life. To be sure, many Christian thinkers have followed the trimurti of the Vedas, the triad of the ancient Egyptians, by postulating a trinity in opposition to the duality of Isaiah. But though many systems profess the triadic theory, none on examination defines it satisfactorily. Theosophists appear to have an upper trinity of spirit, soul, and mind ; but then it is burdened with a lower quaternary of perishable attributes. Christians, through

St. John's gospel, can readily trace the flesh and the spirit, but the third element is undefined. In the same manner my theory lacks the third element, which continues to evade my thought. Yes! the third Communion is vital for mankind, and I WILL find it!"

And after having hurled forth this challenge, he buried his face in his hands, and bowed himself over the bleak desk.

Then the Angel leaned towards him—but I could not realize that song, nor catch its melody. I perceived, however, a great astonishment spreading over the man's face, uplifted afresh.

The Angel bent lower and touched with his lips the dingy forehead, which for a while glowed and wavered with the strange tints of an opal. Then all of a sudden the man cried out in loudest triumph: "With God!" And those transient gleams expanded and intensified, bathing his countenance in glory. He fell back as if consumed by some divine flame. I saw his spirit dart to the stars. . . .

I feel that I must add a note of personal

explanation, lest through the popular ignorance of natural history my story fail to obtain immediate comprehension. Among ants, at any rate, the bachelors being endowed with wings can fly at will. And the word bachelor entices me on to introduce another fact, interesting though perhaps irrelevant: there is no such being as a formic paterfamilias! No! we have all of us to face the certainty that marriage, though inevitable, will bring about our immediate death: in curious parallel to which, the author of the play, "Man and Superman," makes his hero also recognize a kind of death as the portion for *human* bridegrooms!



THE BAMBINO

THE BAMBINO

IT was Christmas time, and it was very cold. A drab-coloured woman carrying a bundle stopped and looked vacantly at the porch of the church dedicated to SS. Aura and Placida. It was certainly very cold : and while she was shifting from one foot to the other, to disconnect as it were the numb feeling that arose through her worn soles from the sodden pavement, she saw that the door was ajar. Oh, well ! she might as well go in and get a sit-down, and there might be a hassock, or anyhow a wood-floor, or something.

In she went accordingly, and dropped into a seat ; anyhow it would be comfortable and quiet, without anyone to move her on. She laid the ragged bundle across her knees : the change of position did not awaken it, but the action brought some more disjointed thoughts into her sluggish brain.

What a fool she'd been ! What a pity she couldn't find its father ! Oh, those Bank-holidays—no good for nothing ! And this little misery to keep her back, and get in her way, and after all her trouble likely enough to die in the end ! No good to her, nor to itself, poor brat ! And yet—she hugged its tiny, wizened body, and kissed its clammy face greedily. The child wriggled away in its sleep, and the mother half crossly straightened her back and looked about her.

And there, in a little corner of the church, she spied the most wonderful group she had ever seen, all beautifully lit up like a Christmas-tree ! A lot of great big dolls, almost as large as life—kneeling men, and cows and things, in a crowd round a young woman, and a baby in a manger ; and over the baby's head was a big gold star ; and all was bright, and warm, and lovely.

Then all of a sudden a notion took her. And it was only the work of a moment to hurry across, to step over the cord, to pluck from the manger the waxen image, and to substitute her own child there,

having swaddled it in the borrowed tinsel. After which she picked up the denuded doll, and ran for her life. . . .

The Reverend Father Hawkins, who had formerly been a dissenting minister, had arrived at the Catholic priesthood by scrupulously following the dictates of his conscience. An earnest young man with that deficiency of humour in his outlook, which is often associated with an engrained reverence for the conventionalities. The church of SS. Aura and Placida, in an unsavoury district of London, was his first cure of souls, and he felt the responsibility somewhat acutely.

Now, although a convinced and faithful son of the Church, his reverence had not been able to embrace with enthusiasm its more sugary devotions. Enslaved by its authority and majestic tradition, he could not help rebelling in secret against some of the ultramontane forms of Catholic piety.

The Saints did not come easy to him : indeed, his was one of those unemotional natures that are much more attracted by the Father than by the Son. So it was in

a purely penitential spirit that he had inaugurated a Holy Crib this Christmastide, and that he had spent most of his slender stipend in procuring resplendent examples of the personages in the sacred mystery.

In all these preparations he had received the most zealous assistance from the old Irish church-cleaner, Bridget by name, in conjunction with his own housekeeper ; and these two were, at the moment of my story, partaking of a dish of tea in the kitchen of the adjoining presbytery.

When they re-entered the church, a few minutes after the flight of the drab-coloured mother, Bridget complacently approached the holy group and knelt in front of it for a soothing moment of prayer. Tenderly and complacently was she regarding the result of her handiwork, when a slight movement of the sleeping infant caused her to yell, " Holy Mother, they're all coming to life ! "

Before long, the mingled cries of the women reached Father Hawkins in his study, and he hastened through the intervening sacristy to discover the cause of the

hubbub. In front of the Holy Crib he found both of the old dames, prostrate on the pavement, gurgling from an extremity of superstitious excitement, and incapable of anything articulate. But as he was searching for the explanation, he himself saw the figure of the infant Jesus open its eyes and gaze at him.

During the next beatific moment he seemed to live a lifetime. Who was he that he should receive such a blessed answer to his prayers? Who, that God should so gently reprove his want of faith? A miracle vouchsafed to him! O thrice-blessed Lord! And then—the baby began to cry at its novel surroundings: to howl: to bawl.

In an instant, something like the real truth flashed through the brain of the priest, and without pause he had reached the wailing infant, had snatched it from the manger, and had disappeared with it through the sacristy door; while the two crones still grovelled, too dazed to grasp what had happened, or in any way to realize later events.

Once in his sitting-room, Father Hawkins

experienced a reaction that was agonizing, terrible ; but at length, roused by the persistent outcry proceeding from the sofa, he set himself in earnest to think and plan for the future, despite those nerve-distracting squalls.

The police ? No, no ! This horror must for ever remain a secret from the world.

His sister Bessy at Brixton ? She had babies of her own. Yes, that would do !

In trembling haste he seized the now exhausted child and hurried down the street, challenged as he felt by thousands of inquisitive eyes, until he gained the shelter of a passing taxi-cab.

Now Bessy, though she had been just as horrified as the rest at his perversion to Rome, had not utterly cast off her only brother, even when he put the final touch to his iniquity by becoming a priest. Her own faith, however, was unimpeachable : her own feelings towards Catholicity were as hostile as they were vague : her one visit to a " Roman " church had been atoned by surreptitiously spitting into the Holy-water stoup. In her own mind she had always

construed the title "Father" in its most primitive sense ; so when John, pale and speechless, burst into her parlour with a strange baby in his arms, she exclaimed in a voice more scandalized than surprised : " Oh, John, surely it has not come to this already ! "

In the end, however, touched by his distress, she accepted, though not without some mental reservation, his version of the affair, and she thereupon undertook the placing of the infant in an Institution ; so the poor fellow left her house easier in his mind. But he was still much shaken ; and when, as he stood in his porch fumbling with the latchkey, he caught sight of the little waxen figure of the bambino stuffed into a corner, he wearily reached for it, carried it into his study, and yielding to a momentary impulse of disgust threw it on the fire.

He had next to force himself to revisit the church, in order to devise the best means for covering up all remaining traces of the scandal. But on entering the sacristy he heard to his bewilderment a sort of quavering drone, which increased in volume

as he pushed open the door of communication with the church. And there, on their knees before the Crib, their faces congested by excitement, he beheld a crowd of worshippers, with old Bridget in frenzied ecstasy leading them through the Devotion of the litany of Our Lady.

With a gesture of hopeless impotence, poor John stole from the church to his study, where the fire was fluttering feebly after its surfeit of wax, locked himself in, and fell sobbing across the horsehair couch.

Next morning as soon as it was light, arising from his miserable vigil, he slipped out, and hurried to the house of the Bishop. But his lordship was not at once visible, and he had to hang about in suspense.

To while away the leaden minutes he bought a morning paper, "The Ha'pennyworth," on the front page of which his eye was immediately caught by a head-line in large type :

"ALLEGED MIRACLE IN A ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

STATEMENTS OF EYE-WITNESSES."

Then followed the account: "A miracle that completely eclipses the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples, seems to have occurred yesterday in the church of SS. Aura and Placida, in the S.E. district! Mrs. Bridget Malone, a most intelligent woman, was kneeling before the newly erected shrine of the Holy Family, when she suddenly saw the figure of the Infant Saviour raise its hand and beckon to her. In her astonishment, she cried aloud, and thus brought to her side another lady, housekeeper to the Reverend Father Hawkins, and together they beheld the Holy Child fly upwards, after he had blessed them in solemn tones! This extraordinary story receives corroboration from the disappearance of the waxen image, leaving its swaddling-clothes behind. The popular excitement is, of course, intense, and the church is besieged by ardent worshippers.

"What adds to the mystery is that Father Hawkins, whom the women remember to have seen immediately before the miracle, seems also to have vanished. There is a photograph of the miraculous church at

page 5, with insets of Mrs. Malone and the missing priest."

It is whispered that, when he was ushered into the Bishop's presence and had stumbled through the whole heartrending story, emphasizing it with the copy of the morning paper, that eminent ecclesiastic was rocked with spasms of uncontrollable merriment; but, however that may have been, he at once despatched a tactful Irishman to the task of explaining matters, and mollifying the inflamed zeal of the congregation.

John Hawkins did not return to the church of SS. Aura and Placida, which has ever since been held in high repute as a place of pilgrimage for childless persons.

AN IMPRESSION OF WEST-
MINSTER

AN IMPRESSION OF WESTMINSTER

THROUGHOUT an April day—in the shine of morning, in the dust of afternoon—I had been dragged at the chariot-wheel of a loquacious sightseer, but at last I was alone. And as I, once more a free man, strolled across the broad, white bridge I heard the thrilling tone of Big Ben awaken the sixth hour, herald of the evening.

The reverberating clock-tower started me on idle speculations as to the frequency with which a fine voice is linked to a flamboyant exterior, until these fancies began to blend with observation in that inconsequent reverie which visits a man, only when the mind is off duty and the feet, having taken temporary command, are the arbiters of his whereabouts. With a numbing sense of impersonality I became hyperconscious

of the parapet, of the ultimate background of glaucous sky, and of the metallic immobility of the water stretching between them, changing ever but so imperceptibly that I was hypnotized by its stare and felt myself under the same spell as the heavy barges which slumbered alongside of the Surrey bank—quiet, bronze water sliding so impassively through the arches. Westwards and upwards, within the sun's direct rule, a haze, iridescent as a cushat's breast, was toying with the distances and even invading the foreground. London, London, whose voice is as the sea, murmurous and intangible, who answerest like Echo to the moods of thy lovers, fairyland of pale tints, home of the faintly golden and the gossamers of rose and pearl, pitiable are the windowless souls, the mammon-clogged minds, the eyes running down with fatness that are closed against thee!

For the moment overcome by the hectic beauty of the scene, I instinctively turned for encouragement to a man standing by my side, of whose proximity I had been all along half aware, at the very moment

when he, oppressed I suppose by unwonted sentiment, was producing from his pocket a cigarette, which he lit clumsily before shrinking back into the crowd. But, alas ! by this trivial action he had brought me back to earth with a thud, and had substituted for a radiant day-dream sarcastic memories of his kin.

It rushed into my recollection how I had once watched, with an interest not at first devoid of sympathy, a worthy British matron as she resolutely climbed a mountain-side. Her comfortable figure was not designed for agility, but was it not written in the guide-book, and emphasized with asterisks, that "tourists should not miss the view from the summit" ! She had a large, honest countenance with infantile eyes that were unacquainted of emotion and opened only to instincts the most primitive. Not that a soul was lacking (it rarely is, except in the ranks of the rat-eyed), but it had been so flattened and squeezed among encroaching lumber that its vitality was reduced to a state of collapse, and it did not give one throb whilst it

was being carried past wild flowers and shimmering thickets, on the way to the advertised marvel.

Before long, her feet began to tread painfully, a handkerchief was in constant demand for her forehead, and her heart was scrawling scarlet lampoons across her cheeks ; but still she unflinchingly laboured upwards. She was a heroine.

When, however, she had arrived at the top, and the splendour of the prospect suddenly shone round about her—when the assemblage of peaks, veiled in dim violet, enticed her eyesight to soar farther and farther, from distance to distance, until it found itself upon heaven's frontier—her soul tingled, and feebly fluttered its rudimentary wings ; and this interior disturbance, through causing a feeling of faintness, impelled her to pull hurriedly from her pocket—from the spotlessness of enveloping cartridge - paper—some sandwiches. A typical herd-mother, unconquerable by bodily hardship yet routed at the first stirring of emotion within her, she knew the panacea for susceptibility to be victuals,

and that sentimentality could be stayed by bread and ham !

But as that woman and the defilement of her paper had passed away, so did my present discomfiture gradually evanesce ; though meanwhile a spirit of restlessness had taken the place of my former contentment. People walked those broad pathways in their hundreds, and I tried to guess their thoughts, or, at any rate, their stations in life. I saw for a moment a face that was magnetically congenial ; but it disappeared, never to occur again this side of death—our friendly intercourse limited to one glance. I turned, and walked like the rest.

After a few steps I was face to face with the Houses of Parliament, a great christening-cake overladen by trivial ornament, obvious and sugary. In disgustedly turning my back on these mincing pinnacles, my eye was caught by the rounded top of a distant tower ; it appeared to be of a faint rosy lilac, and for reasons inscrutable it drew me like a lodestone. Henceforth, it was my object to reach that tower, and I

perceived to my joy that by hugging the left I could keep it constantly in sight.

I passed the comfortable old Abbey brooding like a hen, with one small chick appearing at her feathery flank and goodness knows how many more concealed underneath : her two heads so obviously an architectural afterthought that they availed nothing to weaken the analogy, while the dishevelled appearance of the turf round about seemed to augment the impression of a poultry-yard.

On the right hand, unembarrassed by its cage of scaffolding, squatted the Central Wesleyan Hall, substantial but uninspiring as the Faith it stands for, and so plethoric that if it uttered a sound, that sound could be but a snore. More directly in my course, I encountered the Sanctuary (what profanation of a lovely word !), dominated by a set of buildings sacred for the most part to mechanical engineering. Certainly, in this Pilgrim's Progress of mine, there was a complete absence of temptation to dally among the side-shows !

But the individually incongruous and the

individually commonplace produce no more effect on London than the individually artistic : its magnificence is one of totality, and, as such, is in the realm of subjective impression.

I wandered down a long street, where I began to realize that in its seeming possession of some secret message lay the essential attraction of the pale turret. I watched its crest as a beacon until, just opposite a little church, surrounded by a dish-like garniture of lawn and formal flowers, it altogether vanished from my sight. Quite disquieted I crossed the road, but still not a sign of it was visible ; so I had to return to the left side, where I rambled onwards in uncertainty and some tribulation.

Before long, however, at a turning there suddenly sprang into view the entirety of my tower, which I then perceived to be the complement of a great cathedral, whose real colour was red with bands of transversal white. Startled and perhaps a little disappointed, I now began to find that this soaring steeple was extravagant and its height unending, and to question even its

suitability for a belfry : rather did it seem intended for some gigantic speaking-trumpet with which to compel the ear of the Almighty !

Nevertheless, before I had walked half-way across the space in front of the façade, at the very opening of my preliminary tour round the exterior walls of the building, all such cavilling nonsense was swept away, and I was filled with a half-frightened veneration which has ever since persisted. I cannot describe the architecture, for I have never been able to remember its features. I only know that the sensations with which the scheme of it filled my mind are not peculiar to myself ; for I saw that some street-urchin, in possession of a piece of chalk, had been trying to scribble on those sacred walls, but that even he was conquered by the same feeling of reverential fear : he had been forced to draw, instead of inanities, arches and lines of rough but genuine nobility.

On pushing aside the door of the inner porch and entering the narthex of the cathedral, the overpowering impression is

one of majesty in all nakedness. Afterwards, when the eye is able to comprehend details, it notices that the clusters of marble columns, but half aroused from their primeval repose, support arches of scarred, burnt-out clay, themselves enclosed in other arches more remote, which wander in some elusive rhythm of their own ; and that the whole superstructure of the nave quickens as it offers itself in agonized abandon before a huge image of the Crucified, which hangs from the shadows of the ever-deepening roof.

Illusion like the summer lightning is incessantly playing over the scene, often appearing to promise the key of its secrets, yet shuddering again into the silence of the unfulfilled. All that seems certain is that man is here confronted with a work of genius unbridled by Cardinals or County Councils—with a taste beyond the canons of taste, supreme because unaffected and unique.

The cathedral realizes the spirit of its dedication to the Most Precious Blood, utterly—aye, frightfully. Every brick in the walls, like a living vertebrate, conceals its

corpuscles ; but the ruddy consciousness of them pervades the whole nave and even the dove-colours of the sanctuary. The intention of encrusting the interior with mosaics and marbles may be ultimately consummated, but this can never shut out the perpetual manifestation of the Liquefaction : for the very conception is clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, as was the Word of God in the Apocalypse. The atmosphere is impregnated with an intoxication of sacrifice, which whirls the worshipper on its flood : this may be pre-Christian, this may be Pagan, but it brings its tragedy into the grasp of actuality. It makes certain of a victim—of a frenzied deity who demands appeasement by his own body—of us all as accomplices in the act. No wonder that we steal across the floor with catlike footsteps and abated breath, for the place reeks with that which is of our shedding : we are agitated, even shamefaced, at our share in this God-inspired crime !

Eventually, the fading light, as it filtered through the beauty of silvery windows—all moonstones and cobwebs and the mist of

tears—somewhat restored my composure ; for it insisted on the mystic canopy of the High Altar, that inspired commingling of vault and triumphal arch. Thenceforward I was able almost impassively to witness the gradual supersession of the day. The blur of gold from the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament became more evident, and a yellowish tinge, as if in faint protest, appeared through the tracery of the lunette at the western end of the nave. The Crucifix and the arches were thrown into grander relief, as the lamps by twos and threes stole to their places and glimmered beneath the gloomy capitals, while the windows, after being subdued into translucent tablets of jade, ultimately lost all lustre, like eyes that have wept exceedingly. . . .

The architect who planned this mighty scheme is dead ; and that is well. After having unlocked a chamber of the infinite, how could he have exploited the ephemeral ! He had fulfilled. Disciple of Elias, he also had called down fire from heaven—fire that is still feeding on his offering. He was assured of his message to mankind : alas,

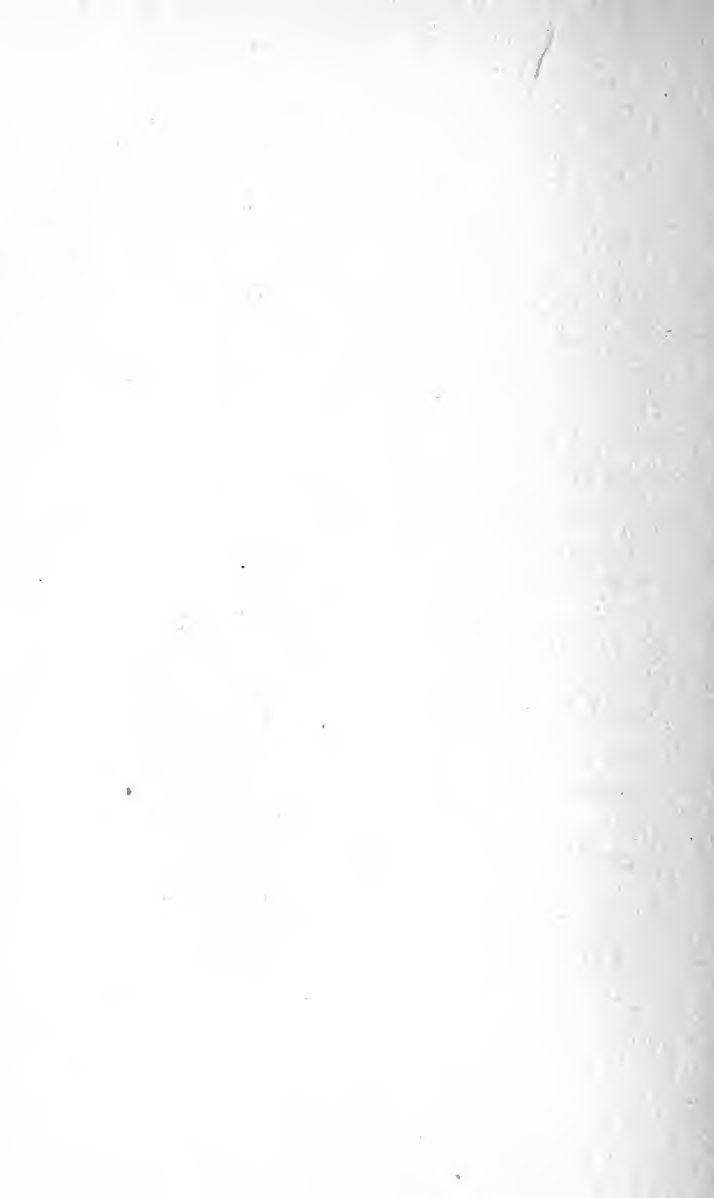
that it should have been a groan ! His lamentation never ceases : “ Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow ! ” It is his agony and bloody sweat that eternally discolour each cube in those dull-brown walls : I know it. For I, too, once wrote in my own blood, and like rubies the characters sparkled on the page ; but though they soon shrivelled and seared, they had once been within my heart—they were for ever. . . .

Shall we in the future find the English people worshipping like a Cingalese convert, whom I beheld kneeling in penitential ecstasy with a cross on his shoulders, a crown of thorns on his brow ?

Can the desolation of a church infect London nowadays, as Toledo, the derelict, has been infected ?

Is this the renaissance of Christianity—or its twilight ?

THE ANT'S SECOND STORY



THE ANT'S SECOND STORY

I WAS perched on the funnel of the little steamer, optimistically called a pleasure-steamer, that plies between Coblenz and Mainz. I, at any rate, was enjoying myself, for the wave-like thrills of warmth were rippling up my legs into my body, and I did not feel disposed to regard the warning clapper of the bell when it kept on urging all except ticket-holders to go ashore.

After all, I might just as well journey to Mainz as remain at Coblenz—in fact, better ; because, though I felt for the nonce in charity with all men, I had a presentiment that my benevolent mood would not prove a permanency—and it would be prudent to get a little more in touch with the frontier before voicing antagonistic heresies as to the impregnability of Ehrenbreitstein, or even as to the charm of Stolzenfels.

That which had conduced to my some-

what rudderless state of mind was, I must admit, an act of indiscretion. For having felt hungry, and having flown in at the window of a fashionable restaurant, I had been attracted by the aroma emanating from a crystal jug, full of a liquid called, I believe, Mai-trank. First of all I only sniffed the air, and from afar gazed at that flagon in admiration of the silver haze that veiled its mysteries. Then, irresistibly summoned by the lumps of tinkling ice, I hovered above this sense-compeller—to behold a strawberry upon its amber bosom, springing like a lotus-flower from a wealth of soft greenery beneath. I have never been a professional teetotaller, only an amateur of a grade to be classed in sporting parlance as “distinctly useful”: under such temptation, therefore, my hover degenerated into a settle, and eventually into a crawl to the brink of the mixture, whose witchery by no means lessened at the tasting.

After a time, I found myself on the funnel of the little Rhine steamer, toasting my feet and not quite certain if the boat had left her moorings. However, after a few whiffs

of awakening breeze, I felt a wish to flutter among my fellow-passengers gathered amid-ships ; but a full-flavoured stolidity that was reigning there did not encourage me to linger, despite an excellent chance of improving my knowledge of the German tongue.

On the other hand I discovered, in a group of English tourists, an objective more harmonious with the silver haze that still bore me company ; and I felt certain that these lads would very soon be all the jollier for not having been formally introduced by Mrs. Grundy, but rather by glorious chance, by congeniality, and by love of mirth. All of them had evidently expected to be under the spell of vine-clad hills, and grim castles, and the rest of the hypocritical gush of the guide-book ; but at the moment when I joined them they were just beginning to realize a sluggish river, on whose broad, sallow face not an emotion was written, as it plodded among insignificant hills vulgarized by the dust and dirt of utilitarian cultivation—and to discover the pitiless monotony of its much vaunted castles.

Following the law of necessity, the bubble of awe-inspiring Beauty burst suddenly in their midst, and in a moment the air became a-tingle with suspicions of merriment, elusive as roebucks venturing forth from the dimness of sanctuary. Each one of these youths had previously assumed his primmest behaviour, expectant of edification : each one had been deceived—and now the chorus of laughter expanded, until the bows of the little steamer seethed with the ferment of hilarity.

Before long one of their number proposed, as a game to while away the tedium of ever-recurring castle, that everyone in turn should tell a story, to commence as soon as one of these ruins was passed, to conclude when the boat was exactly abreast of the next venerable pile : this competition to be a sweepstake, and judgment therein to be obtained by a referendum.

Substantially, the following was the prize-winning legend : a contribution from such a spirited example of bright-eyed British boyhood, as to outsiders can almost restore faith in the future of the human primate. His tale may perhaps be voted intrinsically

foolish, if criticized by cold canons, and its theme may seem trite ; but, anyhow, it was felicitous enough for its occasion, when wreathed in the halo of the spontaneous, of the irresponsible—of the Mai-trank.

The circumstances themselves were exceptional ; for we were approaching *two* ruined castles, one immediately above the other. They followed the selfsame, eternal pattern, although they differed in importance : the upper one being as superior in size as in position to the dwarfish castlet below. When our bowsprit was parallel with these, the official referee gave the signal, and we were plunged forthwith into mediæval romance : “ It is now many, many years, O my brothers, since yonder fortresses were in the heyday of their existence ; but it is to this remote period that I must transport you in my relation of a calamity, with which I should have no right to lacerate your feelings, did it not contain a moral salutary as bitter. Once on a time in the smaller of these strongholds dwelt the Baron von Arglos, a widower with an only daughter, Hilda by name.”

“ I say,” remonstrated a doubter, “ do you think he was really a baron, who lived in that tiny hovel ? ”

“ He *must* have been a baron,” was the decisive reply, “ otherwise, in Rhineland, he would have been a serf : there is no intermediate rank. Please not to interrupt !

“ The great castle aloft belonged to the young Count von Dummundreich, whose possessions were second only to those of the Sovereign. There were certainly whispers about imbecilities and even intemperance, but the mothers of the neighbourhood in their motherliness felt sure that he must be lonesome and pining for the society of some nice girls, so in their charity they yearned towards him all the more. At the period I am talking of, he had but lately taken up his abode in the ancestral home, just at a time when tourneys and pageants, and a multitude of amusements (so-called), were springing up as if by magic to galvanize the usually sleepy country - side into a sort of incongruous sprightliness. This, of course, was purely a coincidence ; but somehow, possibly from the impulsive kindness of

the dowagers, our conceited stripling began to misinterpret his welcome and even to fancy himself the axis on which this succession of gaieties revolved—so much so, indeed, that he became quite satiated and disgusted.

“Up to this time he had never seen Hilda von Arglos, as she did not go into Society. She gave out that she had no taste for frivolities, but the other ladies indulgently brushed aside this damaging assumption of austerity—they said that she had no clothes.

“His introduction to her came to pass during a stroll towards the river, when idly lifting his eyes he spied the figure of a girl, clad in virginal white, reclining on a bank in an attitude of such extremely unstudied grace that he could not refrain from going a little nearer : at his approach she screamed delicately and sat erect. And the young man, though impressed with his own audacity, felt somehow *encouraged* to seat himself by her side on an accommodating tussock. I don't quite know how they manage such affairs, but true it is that from the very first the pair were firm friends, and he naturally

insisted on escorting her to her home when she seemed a little frightened at the lengthening shadows. After this he spent his days almost entirely at the house of his new acquaintances, where Hilda, who evidently admired his voice, never wearied of accompanying it on her lute, nor of listening sympathetically to the hurdy-gurdy of his aspirations ; while she in her turn poured out, in strictest confidence, all the domestic discouragements of which she was the innocent victim. In a week they were engaged.

“ Hilda yielding, as she properly said, to the importunity of her lover, arranged for the marriage to take place without delay, which precluded an elaborate trousseau ; but all the same, there was the borrowing of the traditional flounces of lace from her first-cousin-once-removed, the bespeaking of an archbishop, the magnanimous selection of bridesmaids from the most disappointed of her friends, besides many minor details which kept her congenially employed until the very eve of the wedding day.

“ But, oh ! the shame of it ! In the

meantime the ungrateful Dummundreich had actually sickened of his good fortune, and after rallying from a state of apathy looked about him for some means of escape. But not a loophole could he discover ; for so absorbed in her love-dream was Hilda, and so flawless her temper, that she did not appear to perceive his coldness, and she ignored altogether his clumsy attempts to provoke a quarrel. And so, one fine day, to his horror he found himself at the altar-rail—the damsel by his side—the marriage service in full swing.

“ So also, when the Archbishop put the solemn question to him—‘ Wilt thou take this woman to be thy wedded wife ? ’—he for answer screeched with the violence of despair an impromptu, but quite unmistakable ‘ NO ! ’

“ Of course, the immediate results were appalling. The unfortunate bride had only time to gather up the priceless Brussels flounce before she fainted, and in consequence she put her foot through a vexatiously expensive veil : her father, the Baron, swore loudly and exhaustively,

which so overwhelmed the Archbishop that his mitre fell off ! All the ladies were more or less in hysterics, and a state of panic prevailed. Amid the general confusion its author fled. . . .

“ Six months afterwards a solitary horseman was slowly wending his upward way towards the Castle of Dummundreich ; needless to say, this was its owner returning from a prudently undertaken tour, and, as he reached the spot that had witnessed their first meeting, Hilda suddenly stood before him—but, oh ! how altered. Her eyes seemed swollen, her cheeks were white, her nose was red—in short, she had about her all the accepted signs of genuine woe. Even such a recreant nature must have been shamed by its handiwork, for he exclaimed almost impulsively : ‘ Anything in my power, O Lady, will I promise for the redress of thy wrongs, *anything*—but marriage ! ’ She slowly turned upon him her gaze, far-away and filmy, and when at last she spoke her voice was unearthly as the passing-bell : ‘ Count, you have disgraced me. I am now a byword to my former companions, who

sneer in Rhenish metaphor that I angled for you—nearly hooked you—but was caught in my own net.’ After another impressive pause, she evidently nerved herself to continue. ‘But if you would pretend that we were once more engaged; and at the wedding ceremony you answered “I will,” and left it to me this time to say “NO,” my maidenly reputation would perhaps be again—in part—restored to me.’

“‘Be it as thou wilt!’ said Dummundreich, who was still feeling considerably penitent. And thus it came about that the neighbours were startled by hearing that the engagement was renewed; and the ladies, who flocked to call on her, reported that Hilda tried to conceal her very natural elation, by still dressing in that short-waisted frock, by smiling pathetically, and by retaining a wistful droop in both mouth and mantle.”

“I see the next castle looming in the distance,” chuckled one of the audience. “Lucky fellow, for you don’t know how to finish, and are only spinning it out!”

“ The next castle ! Just in time ! ” cried the historian. “ Now, listen to the fierce catastrophe, which will pelt you like a thunderstorm in its lurid career ! ”

“ The day and the hour had arrived, and with them the bridegroom and the guests. They waited in some suspense for the bride ; and when, supported by her father, she at length swept along the aisle like some icy vapour, most of them, as they afterwards agreed, felt the premonition of sacrifice. The bridegroom shivered as he glanced at Hilda’s sternly resolute face, but on being asked the all-important question he managed to make answer in a fairly confident affirmative.

“ The Archbishop then turned to our heroine : ‘ Wilt thou take this man to be thy wedded husband ? ’ he asked, and in a still, small voice the reply came—‘ I will.’ ”

THE COCK CHAFFINCH

THE COCK CHAFFINCH

TO a casual observer, I dare say, he would have been only a pert little bird, hopping along the wall that bounded the narrow garden of the Carmelite monastery, peering everywhere with the inquisitiveness of a hardened trespasser, while he recited, over and over, in doggerel song his newly remembered rosary of love and spring-time.

To an ornithologist, if he had given it a second thought, the sight would doubtless have recalled the Linnæan title of *cœlebs*, which the absence of the hens during the winter months has procured for the chaffinch. But evidently to a young monk, who was inside that garden, reading his office as he walked the moist pathway under the shadow of the wall, the advent of this little intruder must have been of unusual interest ; for he interrupted his pacings to listen intently to

those strident chirps. He watched the little fellow fluttering down to the path, and noted with pleasure the pink front, the pied wings, and the eager crest flirted as if in full appreciation of a gay bachelorhood.

And as the monk watched and listened, a dull red broke over his face, and mounted even to his forehead. With a smothered exclamation he made a quick step towards the finch, which thereupon, with a saucy jerk of the tail, flitted away over the garden wall. A happy little bird with no soul worth the saving !

But the flush lingered on the face of the young man, and his eyes grew darker as they moistened, and he shivered slightly once or twice. When at length he moved, it was to cross himself hurriedly, to knit his brows over his breviary, and to glide from the garden into the adjacent chapel.

Now, from that time forth, despite of all scruples and struggles, the bird kept on singing in his heart by day and by night, by night and by day. And that wilding song persisted in his innermost being, until it gradually corrupted the sacred meaning of

the lights, the incense, the chaunts—until the very sacrifice of the Mass no longer rang true, and the idea of the Christ, aforetime so poignantly beautiful, became almost repulsive to him, as the story of the Sacred Passion appeared more unlikely, and its sufferings more theatrical.

Unheeded the weeks and months crawled through his consciousness; and then one morning, at the first grey, as he passed the porter's lodge, he saw that the keys had been inadvertently left on a table. He picked them up quietly, and stood in contemplation for an instant, rubbing them absently with his fingers. Suddenly, quicker than thought, he had unlocked the outer door and had returned the keys to their resting-place—the faint protest of a turning handle, a slight concussion from a closing door, and he was in the world once more.

During his first moment outside the monastery, he felt so bewildered that he was compelled to lean against the wall, or he would have fallen. He began to feel frightened, and he looked round expectantly for the chaffinch, but the bird was not there.

Thoroughly unnerved by this circumstance, he slunk down the street, until he happened to spy an empty outhouse into which he bolted. He cowered there in an extremity of terror, from which he was eventually stirred by a twittering among the eaves, and this seemed to rouse him out of his lethargy and to restore his courage. Thereupon, he cautiously quitted his hiding-place, to find the streets still deserted, the blinds still down: in consequence of which, despite the heaviness of his habit that impeded his movements as if unwilling, he was able to hurry unobserved out of the town. Soon he came to a roadside cottage, on which the early sun was beaming so pleasantly that he approached, just to peep inside; and he saw there, through the unshuttered window, some clothes thrown carelessly across a chair. In exchange for these he cast off his own cumbrous garment, and in delight at his regained activity he capered like a fawn as he danced along the road to nowhere.

He was now transformed into a wild thing, fresh and exultant, without thought

or wish but in the present. Sufficient for him was the smell of the furze-bloom, the spangling of campions on hedge-banks, the tingle of the warm blood that waltzed so merrily through artery and vein.

Attracted by the sparkle of water in the distance, he raced up a hill to obtain a clearer view of such a wonder, and as he ran the springiness of the turf caused him to bound into the air like an india-rubber ball. Onward, upward he sped till he reached a smooth plateau overhanging the sea; and here he threw himself on the ground, crooning to it as he rubbed his cheek lovingly against the short herbage. Oh! the rapturous ownership of that patch of glaucous grass and sandy soil, studded with the star-sapphires of the scabious, about which he could roll at his ease, and revel in the creeping of his flesh at the touch of the crisp sward!

Now, when lying prone, his eyes deliberately thrown out of focus, he could create a lush woodland from the stalks of the scant pasturage around: again, when stretched on his back, he could fancy the

hurrying cloudlets to be aerial ships, with a favouring wind astern to start them blithely on their long voyage—their goal the unattainable.

All of a sudden a troop of bright-winged rays, escaping from the upper air, precipitated themselves seaward in a headlong helter-skelter. Like grebes they dived under the surface and up again. But alas ! during that momentary plunge the ravening wave had robbed all their gold from these truant children of the sun ; and crippled, helpless, their glory dulled into the sadness of silver, they drifted on the tide until they were devoured by some prowling shadow.

By and by the wind began to rise, and dreamily he watched its progress. He saw it flick with its lash the faces of sky and sea. The clouds did not resist : they fled from its onslaughts. But the waves confronted it boldly, only glittering the more for its teasing ; though from time to time white teeth snarled, and livid patches scowled, in contradiction of the mask of harmony.

His mind swathed in an infinite contentment, the young man was beginning to feel

that the elements themselves were playing expressly for him a scene from their great comedy—and so—and so—his thoughts were insensibly becoming more and more disconnected and inconsequent. It seemed a matter of course for him to slide into the action of the drama, yet to lie watching as this other self, armed with the sword of science, was invading the depths to fight King Neptune for the gold stolen from the sunbeams. But when he had brought the treasure to land, it crumbled in his hands, and scattered itself as buttercups—and so—in this wise—his adventures floated over the borderland, into the kingdom of Sleep. . . .

Yes! It was the exclamations of many persons that awoke him at last—startled exclamations, accompanied by the tramp of hurrying feet!

In a moment, impelled by a new-born instinct of self-preservation, he had sprung to his feet. He saw them all, his would-be captors, toiling towards him, so he darted at a scornful pace still higher up the mountain-side. He was never to be a prisoner again: he was a demigod: he was free!

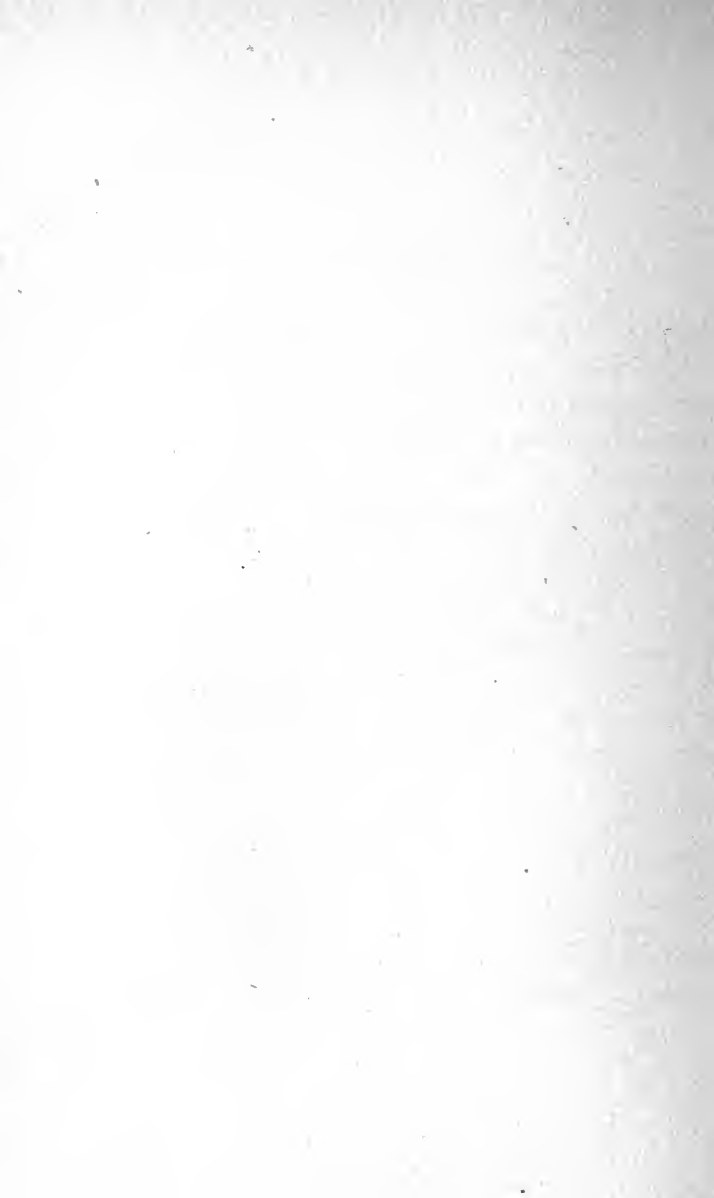
Once more he felt the blood tingling at his extremities, before it surged with triumphant swirl into his heart, his brain ; for, once more the song of his friend, the chaffinch, came to him throbbing through the air—and this time it seemed charged with a definite message.

With a laugh that was almost cruel in its boyish glee, he skipped aside from the path : one poised instant 'twixt blue and blue, and he shot from sight over the tall cliff.

Husht !—a mighty pillar of purest spume—Nature's momentary obsequies are fulfilled.

O Mermen, O Mermaidens, may he find in your home the welcome, the love, the playtime that he lacked during his sojourn among earthlings !

UNAWARES



UNAWARES

“**R**ECKONED by the headlong calendar of Nature, it must be generations since the puling New Year first appeared at the breast of the Earth-mother, for here is one of that year’s own daughters attained to peerless maidenhood ! Peerless ? Yes, there can be no doubt that an English June, all her greys and greens clinging mistily round her, is far more desirable than her continental sisters, with their full-blown charms. Seductive damsels, no doubt, through their bold, melting glances : but a trifle vulgar when compared with the exquisite rarity of a goddess.”

Thus were my thoughts trickling in lazy current, whilst I watched, from my terrace, the countryside quivering at the first hint of evening, and the sun peeping askance at the laburnum-clusters, as if suspicious of rivalry. Gradually, with the privilege of an

irresponsible day-dream, the streamlet broadened as it splashed over some generalities about gardens, even babbling a little when I began idly to sort a few of their varieties into catalogue form.

“*The Kitchen Garden.* Domain of sentiment and stomach, memories of childhood’s first gooseberry and kindred anticipations of the asparagus-crop, with possible ambitions for the local show. Useful, of course, but hardly indispensable in these days of the greengrocer rampant.

“*The Garden of Jezebel.* Despoiled daily of its jewels by scissoring nymphs, so intent on the decoration of house and person that they never recognize the corpse in the cut blossom.

“*The Garden of Dives.* Often miscalled the Italian garden. Remarkable for hordes of uninspired gardeners, and marvels in carpet patterns: colours swearing like tomcats. A promenade on occasion for the poms and vanities.

“*The Garden of Science.* A collection of labelled specimens arranged in their genera, valued according to their scarcity, and vivi-

sected to establish theory. Where beauty is pinched by the forceps, and dies on the microscope's slide."

But by degrees the stream of fancy deepened and flowed more quietly, for it had reached the confines of the ideal, the true Pleasaunce. A lovely land, fragrant and full of shade, agreeable not only to butterflies and birds, but also to the poet, even to the angels: where should be found the symbolism of pagan philosophy: where should be mystically embodied and expressed the dimensions of Reality, by some reflection of sublimities in the ephemeral—of Seasons, of Elements, of Universe, of Eternity.

On emerging from this reverie, I found myself standing close to my gate, and I saw through the bars a stranger who smiled at me; and I smiled in return, for he looked so pleasant. I unlatched the gate, and begged him to have a look round my garden, to which suggestion he nodded his friendly assent.

In silent sympathy we strolled along the frontage of my house, and I remember to

have noticed for the first time how like the daisies were to sparkles cresting the deep lawn, an unruffled lake of chrysolite margined by the amethystine hills of beeches in bud. As we passed two spiral trunks, the sentinels of the inner garden, their drooping heads became murky clouds obscuring the sky, while shrinking from them the leafage of the yew-trees fell earthwards with the heavy abandonment of a thunder-shower; and as we walked the length of a path carpeted with moss, its colours seemed, in their unexpected blendings of the vivid and the sombre, to typify the journeying of Time. Similarly, to my quickened perception, the long streamers of mermaids' hair flung by a willow over the coral of some commingling maples, enshrined a subtle illusion of the sea-floor: the primrose hue of a blossom-clad mound, a sanctuary of the moon: the flickering of sunbeams under the wing-spreading cedars, the oppression of existence for a while among the shadows of death.

Still wordless, we wandered on, lulled by the everlasting murmur of distance, till I

happened to glance at my visitor ; and forthwith the garden took fresh lustre, its very air seeming to be filled with incense and pale gold. A drift of glaucous foliage appeared to be agleam with stolen starlight as it shimmered through its frame of dark cypresses, and the knots of flushing rose-colour on its bosom to symbolize the birth of spring out of the greys of winter. Junipers from their spangled branchlets were sprouting clusters of turquoises, whilst at their feet the purple bugle strewed the soil as with ripened grapes. A cloud of peach-blossom tinged the sky in a second dawn ; and the spires of distant larkspurs, like woodland smoke, offered their own essence to the worship of infinity.

I longed to speak. I turned again to my companion and, as I met his eyes with their strange beam, words unconsidered, and almost at random, broke from me : “ A God walks in this garden sometimes—I believe it, I feel it, I know it ! Maybe he deigns to visit this place, being desirous of the refreshment of mortal flowers, green-throated flowers ; or of the shelter of dusky

trees, after the glow of heaven ; or of the wayward warbling of birds, after the vibration of the everlasting harps and the repetitions of the Song Celestial. Never yet have I beheld him ; though I believe that one day we shall meet in the halo of an hour like the present. Perhaps this very evening—but, Friend, if 'twere so, there would be nothing for us to fear, because our God is Life.

Then He smiled once more, and the splendour of His eyes was like the lightning, brighter than I could bear.

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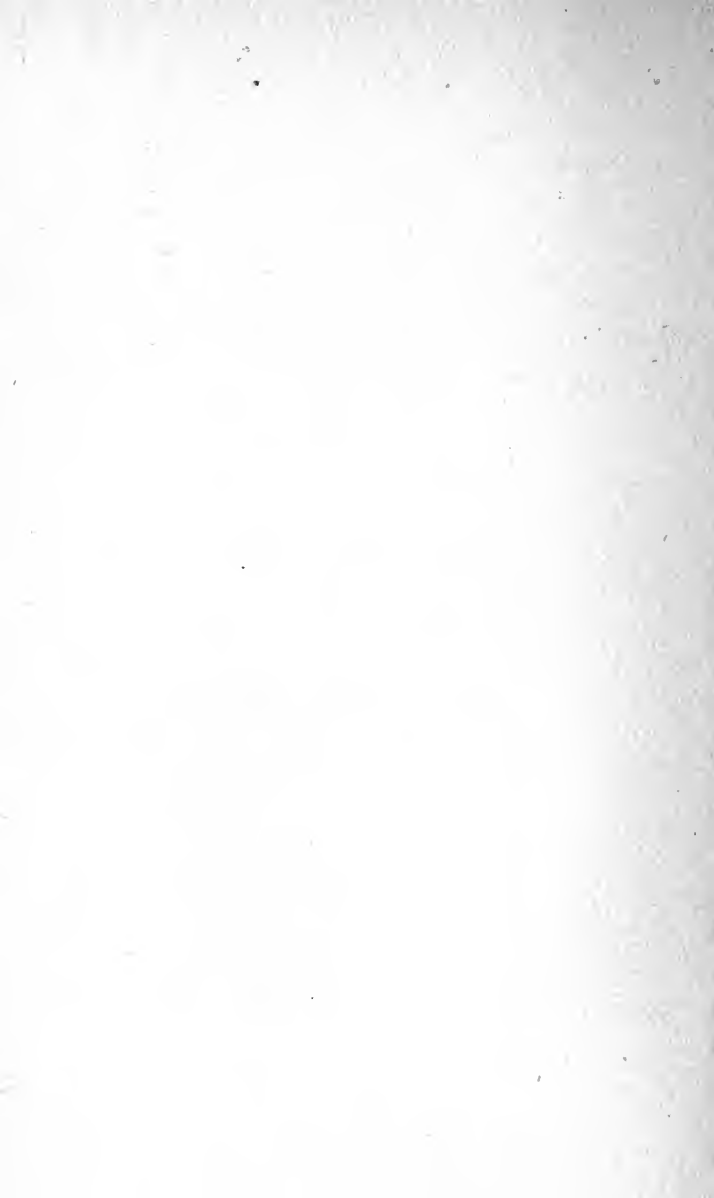
I was on my knees among the white blossoms, the curtains of my lids close-drawn, when I heard a spirit singing low to the thrilling of my heart-strings :

Even on the tangles
of thy phantasy
is borne, is borne
a garland for the Highest—
for God, for God !

I half opened my eyes : the mists of evening seemed to be mingling with the

folds of the stranger's cloak. I looked up—
I was alone.

The Sun had set: he was softly disengaging his rays from the delicate skies, and was charming home his tints from tree and flower. Night was at hand: I was conscious of the first, soundless throbbing in that overture.



AGNI



AGNI

THIS is the true history of Torquil Macaulay's heart, told in language as plain as the libel-law of this excellent country has made expedient. No doubt the weather played a part in it, but the rules of a drama allow of some latitude: besides, this is the truth.

He was a young carpenter; and, although by blood a son of the mythopœic Northwest, he for his part cultivated intellect, and the facts of life: he was a member of the local Polytechnic. He had long perceived that a tree, to be vigorous and well balanced, must stand alone—especially should it be free from all creepers, which only sapped strength and promoted decay: hence he fought rather shy of society in general, and of women in particular. He was not artistic in the sense of a fancy for plush-framed mirrors, for Japanese fans fettered

in ribands, for lamp-shades all blond-lace and flutter, or even for draperies on that piano from which he raised grave harmony when the mood so inclined him: on the other hand, he invented his own designs, and these were of a taste pure, and severely classical. Thus he lived serious, self-contained, and happy.

But one night he dreamed a dream as vivid as the life-dream itself, so vivid that it upset his balance altogether.

His body seemed to be a sort of cottage, in which his head was the front room, and this was well furnished and in good order; while the back room, his heart, was unwarmed and entirely neglected. The damp there had even congealed with the rubbish into a lump that almost blocked the entrance.

Now, it happened one day that an impudent ray of the sun outside dared to thrust its way through a crack in the shutter; and the result was a thaw that made the atmosphere of the back room colder than ever, that contracted him as with a spasm, while grits of semi-liquefied matter by their

attrition made him feel all over sore and uncomfortable. He was annoyed at this intrusion ; for although he at once barricaded, with a makeshift panel, against the recurrence of such a trespass, the incident had called his uneasy attention to a possibility beforehand dormant and negligible. Yes, certainly he had grounds for annoyance !

Worse, however, was to follow. For, under stress of a stormy wind, not only was the new barrier blown inwards, but it carried away with it the whole casement, to the rottenness of which it had been too securely nailed. Then he felt really angry ; and he started off in a hurry for bricks, and mortar, and a trowel to make a permanent job of it. But while he was collecting these materials the storm ceased, and the sun reappeared in all its power ; so, of course, the defences being temporarily down, it glowed straight into his starved heart and filled him with glory. On which, in a moment, he experienced such astonishment of happiness that he was fain to proclaim to the crowd that for all he cared the heap of bricks might

revert to its original clay, and the trowel find its way into the local museum as a relic of the Iron Age—and it was the laughter over this sally that awoke him.

Now, Torquil was much troubled all that day, firstly because dreams had hitherto been almost unknown to him, secondly because romance was altogether so. As he went to his work next morning, he gazed at the sun with a puzzled admiration, and on his return in the evening he studied his fire, and appreciated its warmth as never before.

All the next day, also, the bewilderment of his strange vision grew and grew upon him, so that when he chanced to meet Louisa, the daughter of the first-floor tenants, he actually stopped to consult her on the subject. Now she, being attracted by industry, respectability, and a bulging forehead, had long cherished a secret inclination for such an eminent embodiment of these attributes; when, therefore, he innocently confided this wonderful dream and asked for her opinion, she replied with decision, though perhaps somewhat in-

consequently, as she ran downstairs : “ Now, I often wonder why you *don't* get married, Mr. Macaulay ! ”

Well, he did get married—to Louisa, of course ! And afterwards the neighbours saw no traces of disappointment—they never so much as looked for them, and neither he nor she ever mentioned such a possibility, even to each other ; but all the same, they both had to pay the penalty of meddling with fire.

Oh ! would that tender-hearted women, who are all alike in their longing to be cherished, were but able to realize that the original thinker is frequently a reversion to ancestral type, in as far as being only fitted to dwell in unpaired community, or by himself as a “ rogue ”—a recluse ; and that the ideal family-man is to be looked for among the ranks of the conventional, of the unquestioning conformers to the artificial laws of our civilization ! For it does seem pitiful that so many of these domestic ones must needs select the brazier instead of the warming-pan !

But if Louisa did make this perverse

mistake, she bore with stoicism its consequences: she just put in an extra hour or two at the laundry where she worked, and said nothing. As for Torquil, he spent the most of his leisure in a little toolshed, carving the pedestal for a statue, seemingly a simple work; although in his hands it proved to be an interminable affair, for its refinements were only consummated by fits and starts. It was decorated with no elaborate pattern, but it ascended in a series of flickering curves, and the design might have given to the imaginative an impression of flames rushing upwards. Torquil himself never discussed it, and to most of his critics it was simply a pillar, rather unfortunately asymmetrical, though carved with decision and boldness, a sort of compelling boldness: his wife, however, noticed that, before visiting his workshop, he invariably studied the fire, exciting its blaze meanwhile with titbits of fuel, and that if the sun were showing he would also scrutinize the incidence of its rays.

I dare say that he might have become at this period a definite Sun-worshipper, had

he realized the possibility ; though after all it seemed as if a fire of coal, burning steadily, burning away its life on the hearth, attracted him most. He fell into the custom of sitting over its embers late into the night, because apparently he was loath to leave them untended. With his elbows on his knees, and his chin above his hands, he would gaze at its orderly, beneficent existence, pondering maybe on the immutability of Law.

When the others remonstrated with him, he would reply : “ What a mystery is Fire ! One strikes a match—whence does it come ? One blows it out—whither does it go ? To-morrow we may find it replaced by wave-generated power, or by incandescence in the earth below, so to-night I’ll watch.” But when they quoted as shocking his taunt to the minister that in order to frighten *him* they would have to invent a new style of hell, Louisa, the maternal, only exclaimed in indulgent tones : “ Lord, ’tis only his hobby ! ”

Not long afterwards, when he came home one cold evening, his face seemed to be

stained with a dusky flush, and his lips were so livid that she was frightened. But in answer to her he only mumbled something about a pain in his side, so she did not like to appear importunate. For two nights and a day he brooded over the fire in a silence broken only by hacking coughs, but on the second morning he was found in his workshop, dead of pneumonia, with his arms around his pedestal : he evidently had been busy giving it the finishing touches. . . .

His furniture was eventually consigned as a job-lot to the dealer at the corner of the street ; and there for long stood the pedestal, desolate amidst a miscellaneous stock-in-trade. Customers looked round the shop, some idly, others to make purchases, but none particularly noticed the pedestal, as none perceived anything arresting about it.

One day, however, a stout, overdressed lady exclaimed : " Oh, I want a stand about the size of that one, will you show me some ? " The shopkeeper, after the usual conventional survey of his stock, replied : " I'm very sorry, Madam, but to-day we seem to be

sold out of pedestals like that." "Oh, dear! what a pity, for this one is so plain and common," with a glance at her florid reflection in a neighbouring mirror, "that I really *couldn't* put it among all the nice things in my drawing-room." With the wiliness of his kind the salesman murmured: "Would you allow me to suggest, Madam, that if it was enriched with a band of polished brass and two or three of these French-ormolu ornaments, it would look quite distinguished?" "Very well, if you can make it presentable; but, mind, if I don't like it, I shall return it!" "Certainly, Madam, but I flatter myself I can make it agreeable to a refined taste."

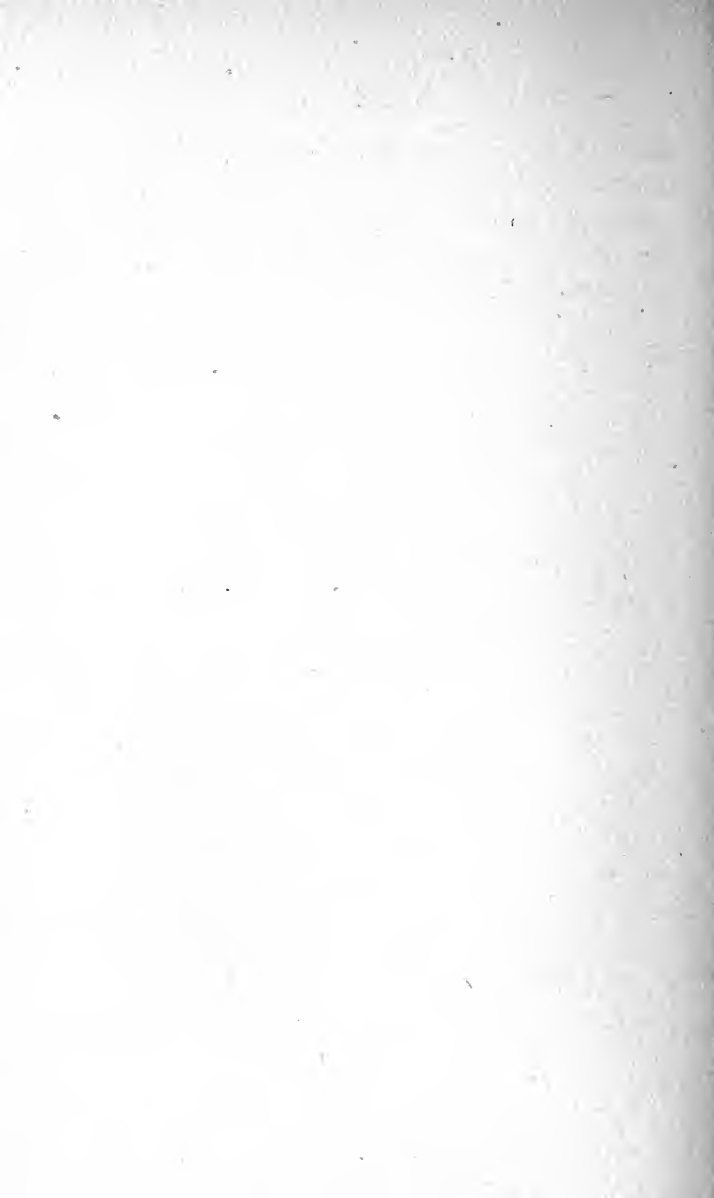
And so the pedestal was duly tricked out with adornment as incongruous to it—as a ballet-skirt would be to the Venus of Milo: but still the inspiration of its maker, and his last sobbing breath, clung to it; for love, unlike lust, will never be driven out by objective disfigurement.

After a while a nephew of the lady, an art-student, happened to call on her, and as he was talking of the furnishing of a

prospective studio, his eye chanced on the sacred pedestal standing in its niche near the fire. At a glance he saw through its shameless, brazen bedizenments; he was able to dissociate it from the dyed pampas-grass that flaunted upon it; he may even have had some inkling of its astral glory, when he exclaimed: "That's a rummy old stand, Aunt, it looks like the flame of a furnace; if it was mine I should paint it red and yellow, it would look ripping—but I should knock off those brass fal-lals that have been stuck on it." Now his aunt had always felt an uneasy suspicion that it was rather too plain for her drawing-room, so she generously insisted on his accepting the admired object, as her contribution to his new rooms.

But that very night a lithe serpent was born of a long-smouldering beam, and glided into the room raising its orange head hither and thither, prying everywhere with tingling glances. It found the pedestal, and hastened to entwine the slender stem. In the agony of those purifying coils the garish dross shrivelled and peeled off the carven wood, which gradually quickened and quickened

until all of a sudden a very column of fire burst forth ; and the flame, hurling itself heavenward, hung trembling in mid-air like the magic ladder of an Indian juggler—Agni had claimed his own.



THE ANT'S LAST STORY

THE ANT'S LAST STORY

IT has just come to my knowledge, O my human readers ! that I am accused of having in former anecdotes invariably elevated some man or other into a hero. Now, though it might tend to glorify the power of my imagination, I could not submit to an imputation of the vulgar error of hero-worship, and worse than that of human hero-worship, and worst of all of sentimental, human hero-worship. I shall, therefore, try to refute this slander, albeit to-day I hardly feel in the vein for story-telling, by an account of the only human event that I can recall where there was not a man in the case : which account, from its precision concerning the vagaries of one of your hand-made deities, may also prevent my being classified among those neophytes who, prostrate before the humano-divine ideal, are necessarily out of position to envisage actuality.

In my extreme youth, in my salad days as Shakespeare so refreshingly calls them, I took once on a time so heedless a flight that I had lost all idea of my bearings, before I was recalled to the practicalities of the situation. The sun was stooping wearily towards the western horizon, and I noted a curious glare in the sky, which caused me to murmur to myself: "Surely these are the signs of divine wrath. The God of this land is out of sorts, not thunderously—but with acidity. Someone will suffer for it."

At this moment I happened to hear a female voice raised in anger (than which sound there is none more penetrating), so out of callow curiosity I poised on my wings, and listened. The voice issued from a house close by, wherein a middle-aged woman, beside herself with spite, was hissing taunts at a pale girl. "Surely the day was accursed when my son brought home as his wife the bastard daughter of a wanton!"—after which final touch she rustled out of the room, her lips narrowed to a scythe's edge. But the bride swayed brokenly, and fell to the floor and lay there in silence; while,

outside the casement, the wind of heaven was watching catlike, though he feigned to laugh with the purple flowers of the clematis, which in the consciousness of youth and popularity were tossing their silly heads till they reeled giddily against the pane.

In my dismay at what I had seen, I cried out impulsively to the God of that country : "Forgo this once Thy right to pain, and tears, and misery ! Comfort, O Lord, this white lamb, and I will——" Here I broke off in confusion, for the commencement of my prayer had come tumbling about my head, flapping like an empty sail. A practical reminder that I was in the country of a jealous God, who had no intention of granting informal audiences to foreigners—much less to insects.

But see ! the girl has stirred ! She is standing now ! Love and home have been dethroned by the horror gibbering at her heart, and she scatters futile words in her agony. She huddles a cloak around her and stumbles along the passage, to the outer door. In blind haste she drags it open, crosses the threshold, ventures a few paces

—and hesitates. But God's wind, having deserted the garden, has crept behind her down the passage, and he is shutting that door.

Ah ! now she is hurrying back, to regain the shelter of the house. " Quick, girl ! "

Alas ! she is too late—listen to the click of the latch in its socket !

A moan—the glimmer of a form flying to the shadow—and the sun goes down.

Bah ! how curiously emotional I am this evening. I cannot continue the story : I don't feel in the humour. It really does not matter if I be misjudged ; and I forget what happened afterwards, it was so long ago. I would rather speak about my own feelings, about my own folk. I understand them better perhaps—and, anyway, I can count on a wholesale ignorance in my readers.

After all, there may be some sort of sympathy, of clannishness, of trades-unionism, among males of all sorts and sizes. It is only natural ; when we have to describe the other sex as of twice our size—with a powerful jaw, and a sting. This is not a prophetic picture of woman made perfect

according to the hopes of the suffragettes, it is the actuality of the female ant ; and to prove that I have no intention of ribald comparison I will add that the first action of *our* female, when she settles down to the care of a nursery, is actually to tear off her wings.

The male emmet is only physically superior to the female at one point, he has thirteen joints to his antennæ, one more than the equipment of his mate ; but this only gives him a more delicate sensibility, which is a drawback in this brazen world. Now man is more fortunate, in that his superiority over his female, says Haeckel, consists in having an extra ounce of brain. I can't remember the exact wording of the text, but his idea is embodied in the following hymn, which I picked up at a school-feast or somewhere :

The ounce left out in Woman's brain,
That most important ounce of all,
Will many curious things explain—
The broken vow, the frequent fall.
In His own image God had wrought
Man for His masterpiece, His best :
Woman was but an afterthought,
And one that showed His need of rest.

To return. Although your naturalists during the last thirty years have made great discoveries about insects, partly from observation and partly from lucky guesses, they have by no means mastered their subject: for instance, our flights, educational and nuptial, are still to them sealed mysteries. They clearly perceive that we are not harassed by industrial strikes, but it has been hidden from them that we are stoically conscious of our inevitable doom—death by matrimony—death on the honeymoon.

Again, the question is completely unanswered whether among males in general, among men as well as ants, the love-passion is attributable to Aphrodite Urania, or to Aphrodite Pandemos—whether it is objectively inspired by one outside personality, or is a subjective growth, and as such, only in need of some fortuitous peg on which to hang itself like a swarm of bees. In this connection it would be of value to ascertain if his hens represent “the fair sex” to the mind of a peacock, and if the hovering Vapourer-moth regard his wingless,

maggot-like mate as the incarnation of pure grace.

Personally I am in some suspense nowadays, as I don't much relish the prospect of my—Happy Despatch. If it were possible, I should so much prefer to live on comfortably, like a human old-bachelor. I often wonder, in fact, when I fancy that our workers are looking askance at me, what would really be my fate if I were to try to introduce the fashion. . . .

And yet—the marriage flight: dancing and shimmering through the pale vapour, from morn till morn again—the being in love with love! Thousands of us moving together, in unison, rhythmically, up and down in the bridal dance—like the motes in a sunbeam, like the waves of the sea!

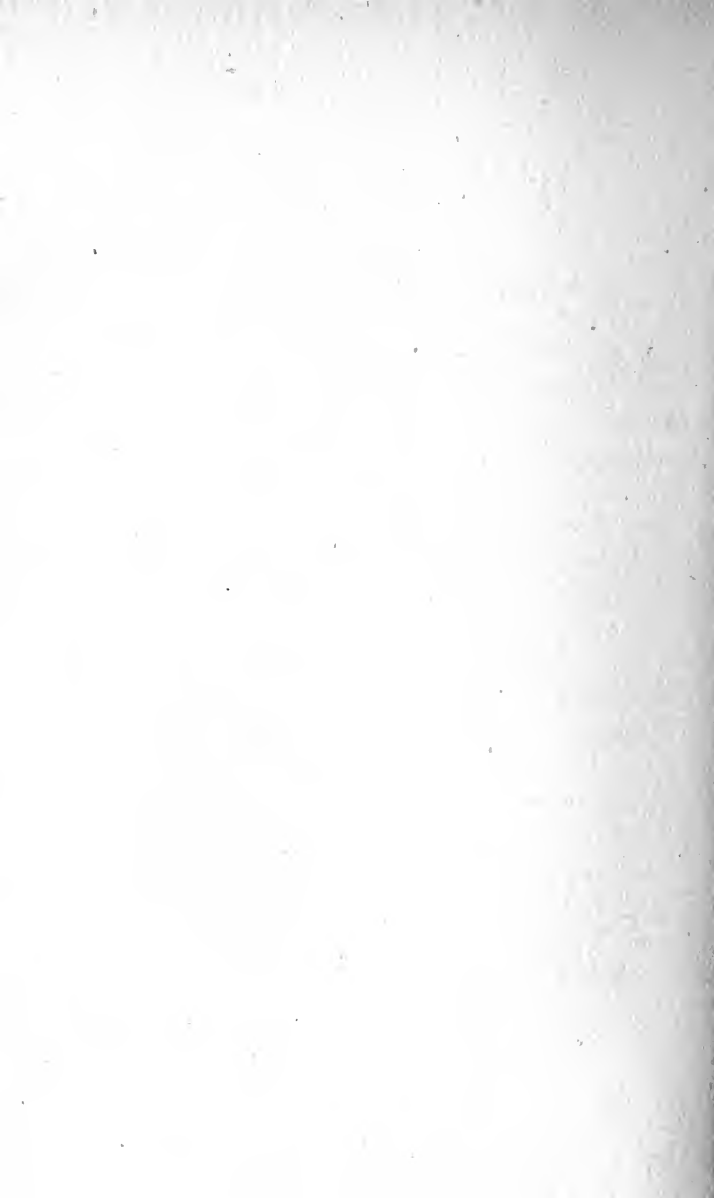
Ah, that Rhythm! It has caught me! I feel it swaying, surging, struggling through body and limbs, breath and brain! It is running like quicksilver! And the quivering and the crackling of my wings—how the flashing colours are streaming! Ah! for the force of the wind—and the upper air!

On, on, it matters not where! On, on,

my beloved ; for to-night thou art mine,
and there is no to-morrow !

The drumming of my wings—the whirring
of my wings ! Quick ! away, away ! I
come ! I come !

A LIGURIAN PARADISE



A LIGURIAN PARADISE

M ADEIRA was all very well, and so were the Ionian Isles, but all the time a feeling of exile pervaded me. I really was a long way from home. So when I spread the wings of departure, it was done with a sense of finality, of closed episode: Faustlike, I was not desirous of bidding the fleeting hour to stay.

Since those days I have visited many parts of Europe, in quest of my ideal for hibernation, which I have eventually decided to be on the Riviera Ponente, between Genoa and the French frontier, a coastline almost within a day's journey of England; for I found that at San Remo, Bordighiera, and Ospedaletti the winter months were for the most part dry and sunny, without that perilous bitter-sweetness, the Judas-kiss of a waspish wind.

Having discovered so much, it only

remained to determine the exact focus of my aspirations, and this I found on the southern slopes above the little town of Alassio. Here perpetual summer seems to be enthroned ; and I fancy that to distinguish the seasons a floral calendar must be necessary, with items such as mimosa-time, for example, or "the promise of the almond-bloom."

During my first January in Alassio there was only one day without any sun, only two on which rain fell ; and this amid rumours of devastating floods in France, of snow at Monte Carlo, and of tempest at neighbouring San Remo. On most days one could lunch in the open air, at a table comely with violets and sweet-peas, where the waves plashed a distant accompaniment to the chaunting of the bees in some creepers overhead. And roses ? Yes, yes, everywhere ; for in this serene land the rose might be chosen as the emblem of eternity !

He who unearths a treasure is generally inclined to silence : for which reason I have been somewhat reticent in the past. The motive for this discretion, however, has

lately ceased to exist : as I perceive from the freshly laid foundations of many hotels that the outside world has at last begun to take an independent interest in this quaint town of the one long street, hushed and narrow as the nave of some ruined abbey, which is so close to the sea that the gloom of its southern transepts is irradiated by an ineffable turquoise.

But, O Anglo-Saxon stranger, mind that you come here in the character of a gentlemaned guest rather than as a supercilious divinity—so that you yourself may be in the picture ! Do not import too exclusive notions of behaviour, and even sacrifice occasionally the propriety of dress-clothes—or if this be too hard a saying, take care that you do not wear them didactically ! Learn the language : imitate Italian politeness : frequent the cafés : attend the parish church ; and, above all, do not infect the atmosphere with northern boredom and modernity !

In Alassio there is a blessed absence of forced amusements : no golf, no casino, no patchoulied peris—in short, none of the

usual vulgarities for the vacuous. But in their place there is an infinity of walks and clamberings among mountains clothed with soft colours, and all the charm of an unspoilt Italy—where you may listen to the delicate notes of the blackcap, and perhaps surprise the distant flash of an oriole, as you wander through shining olive-yards, whose owners gaze at the intruder with the large-eyed tolerance of a Jersey cow.

Other whiles, when indisposed for exertion, you can choose the broken bench of some nestling shrine and, like the Quietist of a bygone day, allow the peace of God to soak its way into your soul. These shrines, lovely mementoes of the truths in a more ancient worship that the Church came not to destroy but to fulfil, are sprinkled over the hills, dedicated to loneliness, and to the Blessed Virgin in her various aspects of omnipotent benevolence—the Madonna del vento, the Madonna delle grazie, and, for anything I know, to the Madonna del farniente, surely the most grateful of them all to the overwrought brains of the present century. Infallibly soothing, also, is the

fellowship of the olive-trees, with their elusive tendency to blend with the atmosphere in a silvern wedding: a wonder, approaching perhaps to the magic reconciliations in the web of the rainbow—Nature's supreme sermon on the virtues of tact.

I have tried to outline a few of the simple joys of this country: but in justice I must also draw attention to the more ambitious possibilities of its gardens, by instancing one that I have often visited which steals like a smile across the face of the hill, three hundred feet or more above the bay and the tiny town on its shore. Rock, and pool, and jewelled flowers in profusion, are to be found along terraces that are overarched by greenery translucent with entangled sunbeams: but all this is as nothing compared with the wonder of its nightly transfiguration.

No sooner has the westering sun vanished behind the mountains, and the sky assumed its robe of indigo, than the surroundings melt into the realm of Faërie. Phantasy enhances the sables of the carob-trees—the mystic finger of the cypress—the gleaming

and writhing of the weird agaves, symbols of Laocoön and the serpents—the transverse foliage of the eucalyptus conjuring sparkles out of shadow—the shuddering of the palms at the touch of some departed zephyr—even the crimsons of that villa which is vaporously exhaling a rhapsody of broken organ-chords.

But see ! the diamond lights of the town below are combining with the stars above, in one glittering panoply, to guard this couch of Endymion ! Or is it that the garden, embosomed in a constellation, is floating, floating away into space among a limitless assemblage of the shining ones ? I feel myself encompassed by twinkling, twirling orbs, and I—— A thin, matter-of-fact voice at my elbow disillusions me by its perfunctory inquiry : “ Did not you tell me at dinner that it took about twenty-nine hours to reach Charing Cross ? ”

BONA MORS

BONA MORS

FRESH from the sunlight : fresh from the warm street, where tiled roof and lime-washed wall have been combining to riddle my eyelids through and through with rays intensified, the bleak corridor of the village hospital is too violent a transition. Its brick flooring and discreet tints react unpleasantly, so I push through some faded curtains—to fall on my knees before a great mystery.

This, then, must be the chapel, very tiny, very quiet. It is mid-afternoon, and there is a vague feeling of suspense, perhaps only of waiting—and in hospitals they are always waiting. Kyrie eleison !

A sickly smell of iodoform emanates from the wards, which are merely partitioned off by the folding-doors that form the entire sides of the chapel. Mawkish light is struggling through a yellow fan-window

above the altar, and it touches uncertainly a sheaf of arum lilies, ghostly serpents with eager tongues, and a handful of tulips scarlet and sin-like, hanging their heavy heads in abasement before the Presence. For He is there, Lord of Hosts, King of Kings, surrounded by rows of brazen candlesticks arranged for the office of Benediction.

Gaunt, meagre, yet strangely harmonious the altar glooms forth, relieved by an occasional glint from dull metal, while the rosy lamp, emblem of Bethlehem's star, twinkles and flickers fitfully in front of the sanctuary.

So this is the court of the Most High, of the King Omnipotent ! This, the abiding-place of the Lord resurrected, and glorious after His eclipse ! This, the seat of the promised deliverance !

Inhuman, but not malevolent, the reproof of the austere sister-in-charge, when I had once proposed to bring some cheerful pictures for the inmates, flaps heavily across my mind : " The hospital is for a good death." And somehow it almost seems as if Death were the master here.

What if this place were to prove, after all, to be under his dominion !

In the wards the patients are reminded of evening devotions by the rising animation of their nurses. An aged dotard, whose vision, focussed on the joys of heaven, can behold nothing less august, feebly salutes as the Madonna—a homely sister, to her evident contentment. A consumptive boy lies supine : his eyes are staring, as the eyes of a sparrow stare when, having ceased to struggle, it lies passive in your hand. A faint, blurred copy of his Master, his body also is sacrificed day by day, and his exhausted lips are even now enshadowed by the purple ritual. His gaze, charged with both knowledge and apprehension, fixes itself suddenly on me, and thus taken by surprise I stammer, “ Courage, you will live again ! ” Instantly there spits forth a “ *Speriamo di No !* ” in a hiss that is half a groan. *Speriamo di No !* Father Almighty, is it possible that this child has neither memory, nor anticipation of joy—at an age when joy, though shallow, should ripple through the days ! His cry is for

covert, for darkness, for oblivion, for the grave: he is terrified at the prospect of an immortality, all glare and exertion!

“Towm-m!” resounds lingeringly from a deep-voiced clock, followed by pulsations of the disturbed ether: “Towm-m!”—the recrudescence of medicinal odours: “Towm-m!”—the impotent writhings of vitality: “Towm-m!”—the drawing back of the wooden walls of the chapel.

Hush! Now should we be in the very presence of the Lord—of the Word made flesh—to receive His special blessing. For there, behind boards almost as bare as the manger of Bethlehem, reposes His Body summoned this day by the incantations of the priest; and this glorious mystery, enshrined in a monstrance, will soon be lifted up so that all men may verify the Presence by their corporeal sense. Hush! Oh, hush!

An attendant begins to light the little rows of tapers on the altar. At first I am only dimly conscious of the process, but before long I find myself anxiously watching the third one from the left, wondering if that perverse point of flame will ever succeed in

kindling the entire wick—it looks so sickly, it wavers so perilously. A heavy-jowled priest, enveloped in flowing cope, invades the sacred precincts, and to the accompaniment of a thready, spiritless drone the service proceeds. But, alas ! for the hostile brightness of the candles, in sharp contrast with the drawling hymns, and the vacant faces of the patients ! It reveals the kneeling celebrant as a pyramid of tawdry tinsel : the flowers as hags rather than penitents : the entire chapel as garish and unreal to the core. In this environment of sham, the divine office seems so mechanical, such a matter of routine, that even the exposition of the Holy Body becomes almost tame, while the tiresome tinkle of a cracked bell adds to the bathos. The priest expectorates, and departs. The smouldering wicks are finally quenched by a thumb and finger, which succeed the tin extinguisher : the partitions roll jarringly along their grooves.

A parting glance shows the face of the imbecile still in flaccid ecstasy, the sharp profile of the boy petulantly averted, the chilly precision of a just-emptied bed ; but

it also reveals Death folding his great, noiseless wings, as he alights to nestle over his children—his own once more.

I return to the chapel, for my heart is tired. I watch the grey shadows, creeping silently from their hiding-places to resume their flittings hither and thither, as they wreath their veils over the wan altar: and again, in the twilight, I ponder over the meaning of this place where gloom is the mantle and adornment. It is no temple of life, present or future. It must be—it is—the vestibule of Death, of cool, soothing, velvety Death. To shut him out my hands violently close my eyes, but stars flying upwards in a tumult are my brain's immediate homage to his omnipotence: I let my hands fall, only to become conscious of a white body emerging from the dusk, the symbol of suffering softened by silence.

O pale figure, with the outstretched arms, art thou the Christ? Or art thou a Saviour indeed, but one older, more universal than He? If so be, thou hast no sting, and of thy victory we all partake! Into thy peace! Into thine everlasting peace!

TREASURE TROVE

TREASURE TROVE

IN the smoking-room of the great liner a desultory discussion on art was flickering, when I chanced to give utterance to a somewhat vehement lament that none of the works of Apelles had survived for our edification ; and as I finished my harangue, I met the eyes of a man who had hitherto rebuffed the advances of his fellow-passengers. It struck me that he was regarding me with the expression of a master, appreciative of the effort of an intelligent pupil, and by that look my curiosity was so piqued that when next I saw him on deck I went straight up to him and without any circumlocution reopened the subject. " I feel sure, Sir, that you are learned in Greek antiquity. Might I enquire if you have ever travelled in search of its relics ? " He seemed rather startled, and again regarded me earnestly before he stammered

out : " Travelled ! Yes ! I have travelled and searched. But all is now faint in my memory—all save one hour." He still hesitated for a second or two, and then plunged into the following statement :

" I was dabbling in archæology, and I had gone with a guide to visit some far-away ruins in Macedonia : I no longer recall their name. I only remember that I had a guide with me, and that we travelled for days, eating and sleeping as best we could.

" We had arrived late one evening at a village adjacent to our goal and had secured some sort of lodging ; but during the night there was a sudden oscillation, and a growl as of a train passing, at which everyone rushed into the street and remained there, watching for the deliverance of the morning.

" As soon as it was daylight we set out on foot for the ruins, but before long we were brought to a standstill by a landslip across the path, a huge mass of sand and gravel fallen from an overhanging cliff. With difficulty we scrambled up the yielding side of this mound ; but when my guide, who was somewhat ahead of me, reached

the top, he uttered a cry of astonishment, and hung back as if spellbound. I hastened to his side, where I saw that he was staring at a doorway conspicuous in the freshly denuded face of the hill. To break through rusty hinges with a kick was the work of a moment. The door fell inwards with a hollow crash, carrying with it a further portion of the crumbling wall: and when the dust had subsided somewhat, the daylight and I entered together.

“At first, all seemed blackness to my contracted pupils, but there gradually appeared through the gloom, massive pillars supporting a ceiling above walls that were decorated with large frescoed panels; and as my sight grew still clearer, my attention was first attracted, then absorbed to the obliteration of all else, by the picture nearest to the entrance.

“I perceived at a glance the subject of this breathless glory! It was the Sun-god dashing through the upper air, scattering the clouds and trampling them underfoot. His body shone white, the incarnation of the purest ray, and its dazzling intensity

prevented aught but an impression of this lord of flame and beauty—too blinding for mortal vision. The light neither preceded nor followed him, it was He ! The sparkles from him floated and hovered like birds, eventually to crystallize in starry pathways across the cobwebbed air, while one diamond beam seemed to pour directly from the god into my brain.

“ Simultaneously their father and their fate, he vaporized the lizard-like wraiths as they were whirled by his very momentum into his presence and perished before his fiery glances arrow-tipped by the swiftness of the steel-blue : the inevitable overthrow of shadows by that energy which is Light Eternal.

“ His blazing hair, the emeralds of his eyes, the glitter of his limbs, the shrivelling of the darkness at his touch, the necessity of his headlong advent, all united to proclaim Phœbus Apollo—the Sun !—the Sun !

“ But as the breeze fails before the majesty of noon, so was the power of my mind sapped by this contemplation ; and

I escaped thankfully, and, as it were, thirstily, to the second panel.

"A cool, luminous grey prevailed in the portico that framed the noble figure of a man leaning slightly forward, held between trance and swoon, listening. In his prominent eyeballs, in his slightly parted lips, in the quiver of sensitive nostril he recalled the ecstasy of some Spanish saint, although the fulfilment of his peace was far removed from the reminiscent agony of a Zurbaran or an El Greco.

"His eyes were not for sight: they glowed like quiet lamps before the shrine of the Immortal! In this manner Pythagoras, philosopher supreme, was listening to the Music of the Spheres, listening to the song of the Celestial Brothers of the universe, as they hymn an eternity where space and time have no meaning—the song of the Quintessential—of the Real.

"My whole being concentrated itself upon the face of the sage, from whom in very deed I seemed about to gather the mystic power of intercommunion of the senses. And as I gazed, I began to understand how

all men, if freed from the tyrannies of this gross dream, miscalled Life, might realize those harmonies. I even fancied for the moment that faint, far echoes were murmuring to me, in a sea-shell rhythm, the prelude to the sacramental poem—the wordless song of God. . . .

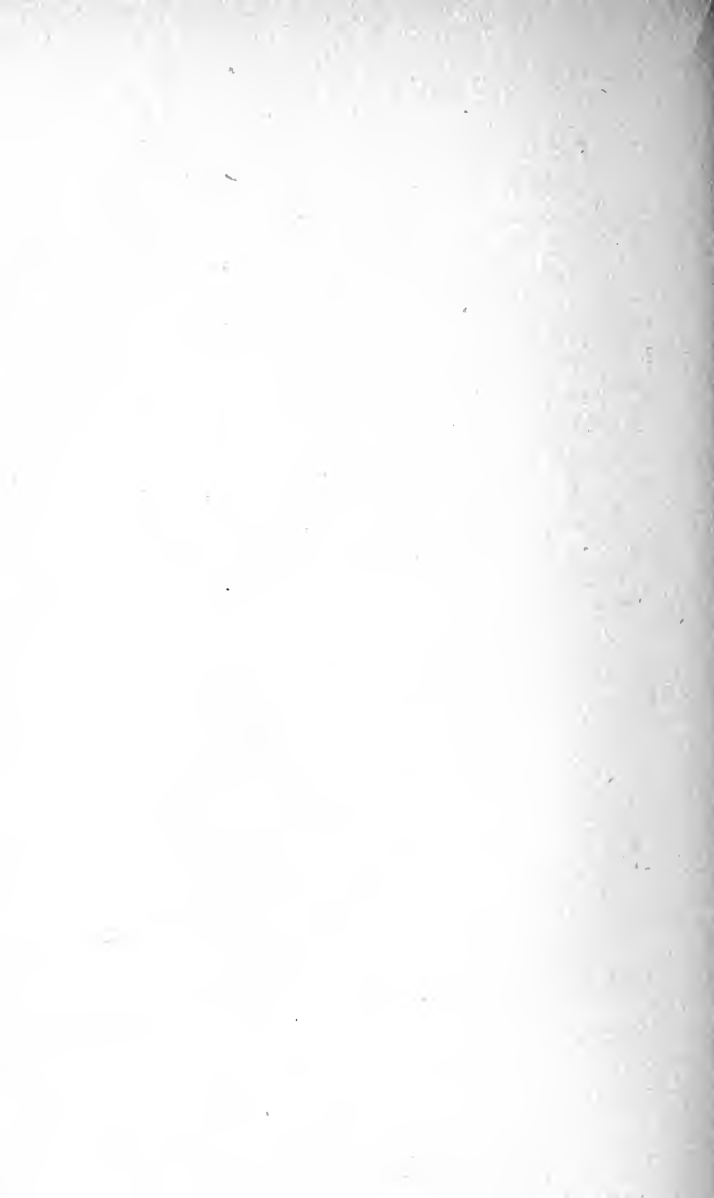
“ But surely my eyes were becoming overstrained, as well might be ! An undulating shiver seemed to run over the surface of the wall. Or what was the horrid dimness that was intervening like a veil. I felt that the picture was receding, and that this was happening in patches. Soon, I could hardly see some parts, while others were fairly distinct. The face itself of Pythagoras was vanishing !

“ Then first I realized that the fresco was actually fading away.

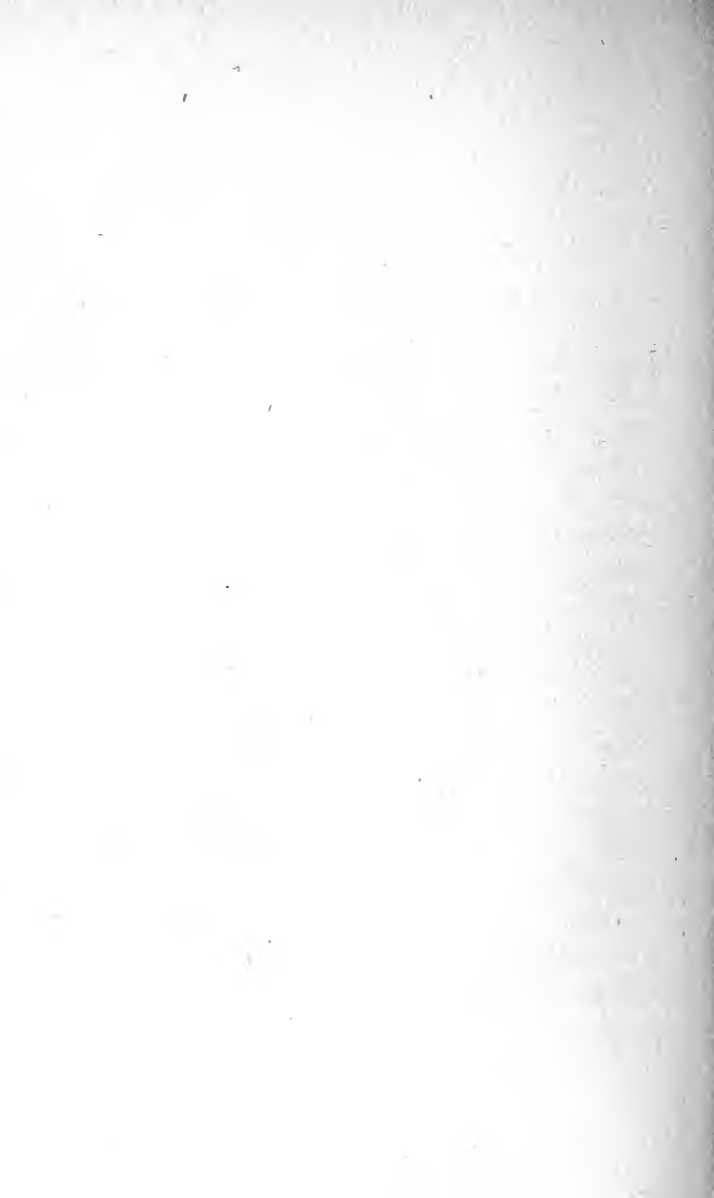
“ I rushed past the other panels, no longer containing anything but blurs of colour and unintelligible lines : I rushed past the space opened to the sunlight, through which I had entered. Alas ! the glorious Sun-god had set for ever, and in the place so lately sacred to his radiance a toad-like stain of dull drab now squatted.

“ I staggered into the open air : I heard the guide’s voice mumbling something about ‘exposure to the atmosphere’ : then suddenly there was a terrific roar, with a shock that hurled me to the ground, as the chamber tottered inwards and collapsed.

“ Since that day, I have unceasingly mourned the transiency of my vision, the poorness of my memory. But I have gained this much of knowledge from the painter of two thousand years ago : that each individual soul must be suns and winds unto itself, even if the light fade and the song die.”



AN APPRECIATION



AN APPRECIATION

IN his former book, which is concerned with the creed of Christ, the author has adopted a summary method of discarding as spurious all incidents that do not dovetail into his own exalted conception, but their excision seems more desirable than convincing—more acceptable to the heart than to the head. And again, in spite of the crystalline beauty of his ideas, there persists an uncomfortable suspicion that his selected gospel stories are being stretched almost beyond their capacity—that the old bottles are being filled with new wine.

But throughout the text of "The Creed of Buddha" there reigns a certainty akin to inspiration.

The reticence of the Buddha on what may be termed matters of doctrine, an intentional reticence as this book triumphantly proves it to have been, has permitted the

development of latent ideas, which are to-day flashing their gleams of salvation to the spiritually-minded of the present age. In like manner a thousand years hence shall the philosophers be able to adapt the same teachings to the needs of that period—for Buddha's evangel is as elastic as the eternal must ever be.

With its earnest sympathy and its keen logic, "The Creed of Buddha" is, as far as I know, the first popular illumination of the deep soul of Buddhism that has been vouchsafed to our generation. In any case, the labours of Dr. Rhys Davids seem more scholastic than didactic in their aim, and those of Dr. Paul Carus lack spirituality: while Mr. Sinnett's "Esoteric Buddhism" savours of the conjurer's bag, and the various clergymen, who bear Balaam-like witness to the more obvious virtues of Buddhism, treat of the subject from a Christian standpoint, which naturally fails to visualize the more volatile essences.

Again, from the very circumstance of their being written in poetry, Sir Edwin Arnold's wonderful books, though permeated

with recondite Buddhistic truth, excite a sense of unreality in many minds—the choice of rhythmical words suggesting artifice to the matter-of-fact.

The author of “The Creed of Buddha” for the moment preferred an anonymity—most acceptable to independent readers who resent the present-day custom of involving personality with literary work—which gave him some protection from the ha’penny zeal that might have already told us the number of his daily meals and the brand of his under-clothing! Thus he descended upon us as if from another world, to preach a spiritual philosophy that could stand of itself, on its own merits. And his clear thinking, his clear language, the logical procession of his solemn chapters lead us gradually but irresistibly to the conclusion—that the Universal Soul is the true self of all men, though the process of soul-growth will alone enable us to realize this; and that the most inexorable of all Nature’s laws is the law that makes the universe one living whole, the law of centripetal tendency, the law of love.

In the preface an appeal to common sense

rather than to erudition is made. "The indisputable fact that Buddha himself kept silence with regard to the ultimate realities and ultimate issues of life shows that the task of interpreting his creed is one for 'criticism' (in the widest and deepest sense of the word) rather than for 'scholarship'—for judgment that enables a man to make use of the learning of others, rather than for learning as such."

The first chapter, "East and West," contains a comparison of the differences that underlie the religious thought of two continents. But though it points out that "for all but a chosen few the figure of Brahma [the world-soul, the all-embracing life] must needs recede into the dim background," and "as it recedes, lesser Gods—some beautiful, some terrible, some loathsome, some grotesque—emerge from the darkness and claim man's homage," it shows that these strange cults are all of them stepping-stones by which the awakened soul can make its way out of the morass of a wholly material existence.

Clarity, beauty, truth are mingled in the

following august exposition, which must compel the admiration due to a masterpiece ! “ The soul, or inward life, alone is real. Eternity is a vital aspect of reality. Birthlessness and deathlessness are the temporal aspects of eternity. The present existence of the soul is not more certain than its pre-existence and its past existence : and these three—the past, the present, and the future lives—are stages in an entirely natural process. . . . Issuing from the Universal Soul, it must eventually be re-absorbed into its divine source. Beginning its individualized career as a spiritual germ, it passes through innumerable lives on its way to the goal of spiritual maturity. The development of the germ-soul takes the form of the gradual expansion of its consciousness and the gradual universalization of its life. As it nears its goal the chains of individuality relax their hold upon it and, at last—with the final extinction of egoism, with the final triumph of selflessness, with the expansion of consciousness till it has become all-embracing—the sense of separateness entirely ceases, and the soul finds its

true self, or, in other words, becomes fully and clearly conscious of its oneness with the living Whole."

Chapters 3 and 4, "The Path of Life" and "The Teaching of Buddha," are as plain and practical in their teaching as their forerunners are idealistic. Indeed, so much to the point are they that the average man will soon be terrified by the tottering of his rampart of excuses, and at a most uncomfortable sense of an unsubstantial, objective world slipping from under him. They insist that before all else self-control is necessary, though only as a means of establishing healthy "soul-growth": that this in its turn will slowly but surely lead up to the acquisition of true knowledge or grace, which is erroneously represented as a supernatural gift. They condemn supernaturalism (the abrogation of natural law) with no uncertain voice: they condemn also the "false dualism" that admits of no intermediates, that distorts polar opposites into alternatives—that divides by a hair's-breadth South Heaven from North Hell! We learn from them that there is nothing

heroic about entering the Path and practising the simple life of the soul, no convulsive storming of high heaven—and therein, maybe, lies its principal hardship for this melodramatic generation.

Chapter 5, "A Misreading of Buddha," is perhaps the least satisfactory portion of this remarkable book. Not from any failure on the author's part to demolish entirely the arguments of the "metaphysical atomists," based on Buddha's supposed denial of the Ego: but simply from a feeling of regret that so eminent an architect should have had to undertake even temporarily the work of the housebreaker.

Chapter 6, "The Silence of Buddha," and chapter 7, "The Secret of Buddha," are so continuous in their stream of subtle reasoning that any attempted abridgment would fail in its object. There is no superfluous sentence to omit: these treatises must be studied at first-hand.

It is curious to find that the dilettante in religion, the man of much curiosity to little purpose, who while prattling of summits is contented to walk the plains, existed even

in early days ; though he received scant encouragement from the Buddha, who declined to discuss secrets of existence, which had to be discovered by each one for himself. For, the Exalted One saw clearly that no one could appreciate truths so long as they were above the level of his present understanding, that wisdom was not to be learned from any ready-made formula, and that enlightenment could be won by him alone who, having swept the rubbish out of his soul, succeeded in deciphering the shadowy characters that were thus laid bare.

Chapter 8, "The Bankruptcy of Western Thought," is an indictment of the religious materialism of Europe, ironically clothed in the language of commercial finance ; while the concluding chapter, "Light from the East," is an eloquent appeal to Europe to fertilize its barrenness by the influence of the spiritual thought of India, by the ethical philosophy of the Buddha—and for so doing Christ's own example is cited as a precedent.

It has been a difficult task to give any idea of a book, in which all is memorable and all interwoven by chains of reasoning as

strong as they are unobtrusive. Its facts are familiar to many, but its deductions are startling in their boldness and originality. In very truth, many of these deductions are so momentous that I have not dared even to hint at them, for fear of doing them injustice within the narrow limits of this essay.

LONELINESS



LONELINESS

ON my way to Java I had the good fortune to fall in with two congenial fellow-travellers, and we journeyed thenceforward in company. Our goal was the derelict Buddhist temple of Boro-Budur, but on leaving Batavia we often turned aside to visit the famous monuments that were adjacent to our route.

On the outskirts of the ruined palace of Kratonja Sultane stood an elliptical arch, under which we had to pass. In designing it, the architect must have dreamed of a glory of wings and blossoms, and have endeavoured to reproduce on its spandrels the supreme moment of his vision: for the conception was not of this world, either in subject or in treatment.

Afterwards, as I rode along, my mind was continually returning to that gateway, which, despite the lofty distinction of the palace, did not somehow assimilate with its

scheme ; and I did not feel at ease until I had decided that such a masterpiece must have been really intended for the first introduction to the distant Boro-Budur that I had come from so far to visit, that I was ever approaching. Moreover, the enchantment of peerless Java, where the skies are pale from scattering their sapphires broadcast over the landscape, contributed to a state of exaltation in which I began to believe that the very highway was to me, who had already passed through its portal, but an avenue leading to the great shrine.

It was in the early morning, when the guide announced to us that we were in sight of Boro-Budur ; but through the mist I could only see the trees standing like sentinels, as I did not know what to expect, what to look for. Before long, however, I descried in the distance that which at first seemed to be a grey village on a slope, backed by the high peaks of volcanic mountains.

Frankly, my first feeling was one of disenchantment at the general effect of this roofless pile of building : it did not realize my ideal.

It seemed, as I kept drawing nearer, that I saw before me a square citadel occupying an entire hill, a vast equilateral, converging gradually toward its summit on which stood a large rotunda, surrounded by a cluster of subsidiary bell-shaped cupolas: the aspect of the whole being that of a confusion of ramparts and throned images.

I walked up a broad approach, bristling with stone lions of heroic dimensions, before I reached the steps to the lower galleries. There were four of these, curiously alike though, of course, diminishing in size. The walls were covered with sacred bas-reliefs, exquisitely chiselled, but with such profusion of detail that they dazed the beholder: they formed a background to over four hundred enshrined statues of the Buddha, nearly life-size, which were separated from each other by the sitting figure of a man and a woman alternately. Above these four terraces had been placed a rampart of bold and attractive design, which divided the whole structure into two portions. The upper part was possessed by three tiers of small domes, each of which protected a

lotus-throned statue of the Master in meditation. Here aloft, he was invariably in meditation, which contrasted with his presentment throughout the lower galleries, where he was frequently in the acts of preaching and receiving his disciples.

By the time we had roughly explored the precincts, the heat was almost overpowering, so we retired for the midday rest. . . .

I had been dozing, I suppose. For the first words that I gathered from a conversation between my companions were: "It seems to me that the difference is that Buddhism only lends one a soul, while Christianity gives it. And I must own that a definite Heaven seems to me better worth struggling after than Nirvana—the supreme negative."

"I don't know about that," laughed the other voice. "I have been educated to a Heaven that is a kind of Walhalla for prosperous, middle-class people. All of us know by heart its hackneyed trivialities, and we have reconnoitred in anticipation every corner of that swept and garnished spot—with its Salvation choirs, its mo-

notony, and, unkindest cut of all, its resurrection of the body. But there! I suppose that most of us like to touch bottom, to keep one foot on the definite even if it be the unlikely : anything to shirk the deciding for ourselves on such subjects." I did not wait to hear any more : I stole away. All the same, when I got outside I found myself harping on the same string : " Yes, yes ! In fact, we really resemble the ladybirds, which sham death, and will resign themselves to its reality, rather than take the trouble to spread their ample wings, even for the sake of freedom and security ! "

I climbed into the cool silence of the temple, into a solitude shared only by a pair of soaring kites, and by some wild bees attracted to the flowers rooted in crannies of the masonry—an association that restored my faith that wing and blossom were the tokens to gain me admittance into the true Boro-Budur. Anyway, as I scaled the side of that storied mount, all inquisitiveness, all criticism seemed to die away before the growth of understanding and appreciation—not of technicalities in the architecture, but of its

hidden meaning. The numberless Buddhas tranquillized the senses, diffusing serenity and peace, as do the beads of rosaries with their reiterations so mechanical that they become merely a harmonious accompaniment to independent thought ; while the subordinated bas-reliefs typified the toss and turmoil of the world outside.

I gained the dividing rampart, and passed into the upper calm. Here were the rarified surroundings in which to envisage verities ; for in such a place discussion and argument, sacrifice and worship, prayer and praise would have been alike impertinent. This was the abode of exalted meditation, where conventional routine was sterilized by the comprehension of its proper function. I sat in the stairway at the feet of the solemn conclave—images with their features heavy in that concentration, which like some majestic undertone supported their musings.

An incident that had happened to me before I left England drifted across my mind. I had been induced to consult a wizard, a man of great repute as palmist and soothsayer. His diagnosis of my character

was sufficiently correct, although in it, of course, my virtues were rather over-coloured. But there came a sudden catch in his voice, with the exclamation: "Oh! it is painful—your loneliness. I am sorry for you, so tired, and so very, very lonely. Even your gifts would seem to be curses in your entire solitude." "But I have many excellent friends!" I objected, startled into words by this outburst. "Not spiritual friends," he retorted, "though you may be thrown among good people who like you, and of whom you are fond: there is no one that satisfies your inner self, and there never will be. Like Tantalus, you will be athirst, although surrounded by plenty. Others possess their affinities, but you were born an odd number!" After this speech he drew back, almost as if his light touch must be hurting my hand. "Do you mean," I questioned, "that my lovers and friends are to be like those of the Psalmist, that I have virtually drawn a bye in life?" He bowed his head, and would speak no more on the subject.

Although I was not altogether a believer

in the man, his dictum had certainly rankled ; for I was impressed by that curious break in his voice. But by a flash of enlightenment, I now perceived that he had only uttered a commonplace of superficial criticism about a career in which the centripetal trend was just becoming apparent—in which instinctive segregation had become a factor, as in the caterpillar when impelled to cocoon-spinning.

Indeed, the evolution of the butterfly is altogether emblematic of the journeyings of a soul through the world—firstly as the ovum before the attainment of sentience ; secondly as the larva or caterpillar, active and communistic ; thirdly as the pupa or chrysalis, in quiet seclusion ; finally as the winged Imago which floats away to life and the sunshine. In like manner, the intelligence has to pass through four phases—the germinal, the material, the spiritual, the divine—before the Soul can arrive at the absolute realization of self, that entitles it to salvation.

Wherefore, it is not by minimizing but by expanding selfhood that a man can make

progress. As phosphorus stores up the sun-rays to diffuse them in dark places, so must he collect wisdom against barren days : as a silkworm extracts from itself the golden fabric wherewith to shut out the world, so must he weave home-grown beauty into a veil to interpose between his consciousness and the actualities of this life. What matter whether the sky be clear or overcast, whether the flower be rose or thistle, since all phenomena are manifestations of the same energy !

After a while, the lethargy of fatigue stole over me. I was wide awake, but my volition was failing, my vitality was giving out. The blood in these tropical countries becomes thin and curiously volatile : I could feel it trickling away from my brain. There is, I suppose, a like experience in the shadow of the death-hour. If so, the joy of surrender must surpass the joy of victory !

I was aware of Mount Sumbing thousands of feet above me, together with the other cones glowing and gleaming in Java's mysterious purples. I was aware of the creation of a far sunset-land over the western

rampart: of the heavy clouds changing into dreamy hills crossed by rays of spectral light, angel-paths from glory to glory: of the tongues of fire and the shallows of peacock-green melting into each other, only to separate like earthly loves and to fade eventually into the all-conquering grey.

Then, as always, the cicadas struck up their immediate pæan to the night, and I listened passively to their chorus, unceasing and monotonous as the crying of the seraphim; until at last I was released from my reverie by the cheery voices of my companions, on their way to the summit for a view of the moonrise. . . .


Long ago the saffron-robed monks have passed away, long ago the volcanoes have ceased to offer their incense, but Borobudur still ponders over the Nirvana of final accomplishment.

FROM AN OLD DIARY

FROM AN OLD DIARY

IN the opening days of the year 1889 I found myself at Marsala, a mock-oriental sort of place—bearing the same relation to the genuine East as does its wine to sherry. I had just finished a tour through Sicily, and was in quest of a steamer to take me to North Africa.

In the hall of the hotel a German was addressing his dried-up wife in a tender guttural, reminiscent of the outpourings of a slender-necked bottle, and I sighed at the thought of such as they being my only fellow-guests. But my despondency was premature, for shortly afterwards in strolled an American—debonair, preternaturally knowing as is the habit of his countrymen, and a traveller to the tips of his sensitive fingers. In the circumstances we of course fraternized, and were soon laughing and talking like old friends.

 I shall never forget how he charmed and amused me by his witty sallies, and by the solemnity with which he would introduce the ultra-ludicrous. He had his irrelevant flashes of genuine seriousness too—ah, well! I shall never forget that evening!

I remember that he set himself to persuade me that I had hitherto only wandered around, not having so much as touched the hem of oriental truth; to which I retorted that certainly a paradise paint-box had never been included in my luggage, if that were what he meant.

“To condense a fact into its smallest possible compass,” said he, “is to make it look unnatural as well as inelegant, like your clothes would appear after being crushed in the packing.” And he gravely recommended me to close my eyes each day at a fixed hour, imagining myself in the farthest orient; after which discipline, to write down my recollections of the journey through space. This he called the culture of subjective or elsewhere truth.

“I believe,” was my comment, “that I

catch your idea, which exhibits a novel facet of this gigantic abstraction :

“ Say what you will ; yea, heights unrivalled dare,
There is no lie that’s not a truth somewhere ! ”

And so on, with chaff and laughter till nearly midnight, when the porter came to warn me of my necessary departure for the boat.

My companion vowed that he wished it had been possible to go with me to Tunis, and he added : “ You say you are going through Algeria afterwards, so why shouldn’t we meet at Hammam Meskoutine to-day fortnight, and make together that expedition into the desert, from Biskra ? ”

“ I will be there,” I gladly promised, “ though it will be at your risk, for my conscientiousness may tend to ossify your fairy-like adventures.”

In due time my ship arrived at Goletta, the port of Tunis, and I disembarked amid the usual yelling of aborigines, from whom I was delivered by a small Israelite, agile with silver stars and crescents on a groundwork of dark blue. I felt as if I were in the presence of a power of the night—at a

Covent Garden ball: but no! he proved to be only an understudy of the porter at the Grand Hotel. My new protector was genially loquacious; but he frightened me by his clairvoyant acumen—he knew my name, had seen me previously in Marseilles, and probably was well versed in all the arcana of my career.

Next morning, despite torrents of rain, he worried me into starting upon the round of the sights. I have a dislike to official sight-seeing at its best, and my powers of observation are always depressed thereby; however, I was taken to the Bardo palace, which I found to be furnished in the crudest European taste. The glare of its gold created wild longings for a cup of cold water, or a dinner of herbs, or any other of the stereotyped antidotes; and gave me reason to doubt the inspiration of those prophecies about heaven that encrust it with bullion, which, at any rate, when coupled with magenta satin, seems more indicative of quite another place.

The day after, even in bed, I was invaded by my self-constituted guide, armed with

two sinister-looking muskets ; and I felt quite relieved when I discovered his object to be plunder without assassination—that he merely wished to sell me the weapons. Nevertheless, to escape purchasing them, I had to promise that he should personally conduct me to Carthage.

I went to Carthage ; but alas, it had been so “blotted out” that even sentiment could not reconstruct it ! A few cisterns here, some broken pillars there, and a handful of insignificant relics wrapped in a peasant’s dirty apron, were the only visible indications of Rome’s former rival. They prated of the palace of Dido, the Forum, the temple of Æsculapius—but one stone was not left on another (nay, there was hardly the one stone, not to mention the other !) to mark their former whereabouts ; and I suspected that the brand-new Catholic cathedral, so flamboyantly perched on a neighbouring hill, probably contained far more of Carthage than did the forlorn site itself. . . .

It was on Tuesday, after my return from an expedition down the coast, that I

remembered my rendezvous at Hammam Meskoutine on the Friday ; so there was not much time to be lost. I was to travel by the newly constructed railway that connected Tunisia with Algeria, but I heard a rumour that the line was broken by the heavy rains, and that traffic was suspended—an ugly rumour that I could not verify from the sphinx-like authorities. My train was due to start soon after five o'clock next morning, but not until bedtime did I receive official notice that tickets would be issued only to Ghardimaou, a place about half-way to my destination. I was warned against starting—but, of course, I had to start !

Towards noon the train duly reached Ghardimaou, a desolate place enough. Apparently there was no hope of proceeding any farther by rail, so I importuned the Caid of the village for mules to convey me over the mountains to Souk-aras, the other side of the break ; but I could extract from him no definite promise, only the information that such a journey would take eleven hours at least.

However, on my crestfallen return to the station I was gladdened by one ray of hope. I got an inkling of the arrival of a secret telegram announcing that on the morrow a special train would run right up to the break, as the engineer and a director wished to inspect the disaster. There would surely be means of getting to the other side, if only I were allowed a seat in that special !

Next morning before six o'clock I was on the platform, though the station-master professed to know nothing of any special. But in an hour's time an engine stole up with a carriage and a van, and by the courtesy of the director, who respected my impassioned appeal, I was allowed to be one of the seven to make that journey. The train, like Agag of old, went delicately ; for the line was all the time on the banks of a river, which it had to recross thirteen times between Ghardimaou and Souk-aras, and there was no certainty where the heavy flood might not have undermined the railroad.

We ventured cautiously along for more than an hour, anxiously watching the metals and listening to the spiteful hissings of the

torrent, until the train finally stopped close to the complete ruin of a hundred yards of embankment at an elbow of the river, where the current in passing seemed to snatch savage bites at the hill-side round which the rails were hanging like a necklace, forty feet above the water.

From this spot we had to scramble as best we could over the boulders and rubbish, our luggage being dragged after us by a horde of Arabs, until we reached a place of safety on the opposite side, where we waited for the news of our successful crossing to be telegraphed forward. And, indeed, there was plenty with which to occupy our minds as we stood there ; for without any warning, the hill that we had just skirted seemed to heave a deep sigh, and down crashed the suspended metals into the stream, accompanied by huge masses of earth and rocks.

Half an hour afterwards we were carried off on a trolley shoved by relays of natives running along the metals, soon to be transferred to another engine and carriage which bore us through a blinding snow-storm to Souk-aras.

So, after all, I arrived at Hammam Meskoutine on the Thursday night; and next morning I visited the phenomenon known as the petrified cascade, which is little more than a stone-throw from the hotel.

Imagine the head of Medusa to have been flashed before the varying tints and shadows of a waterfall, with the result that the rush and swirl of its foam upon foam, the deep honey-green of its elusive eddies, the rainbows of its sparkling drops—were transfixed in the midst of their play, and became for evermore motionless, tangible! To this extent you may conjure up some reflection of this supreme tribute to sleeping beauty, though none but an eyewitness will ever understand the thrill of the involuntary expectancy that, while he is watching, it will—it must—reawaken.

After this supreme sensation I walked languidly among pearl-lined basins of boiling water, and fissures snorting forth steam, to see the famous cones, which by Arab tradition are really the desiccated participators in the rites of an incestuous marriage—these persons, together with the entire

landscape, having been thus metamorphosed in the twinkling of an eye. Now this is not an edifying tale, for it hints at the possible failure of divine retribution, like Balaam's curses and occasionally butter, to materialize ; since to flourish, a rose-tinted monument crowned with ferns and bedecked with delicate lichens, in a woodland of wild olives, is certainly a kinder fate than to fester, an offensive skeleton in a box, which would have resulted from more orthodox behaviour.

Another local legend, less popular but more suggestive, relates that Solomon, when on frolic bent, used to patronize these hot springs ; but in his proverbial wisdom dreading tell-tale gossip, he deputed as his attendants some genii who were blind and deaf and dumb, a triple padlock on intimate matters. And to this day those faithful genii, all unknowing, continue to fill and empty his bath. . . .

When I returned to the hotel, I found that my American acquaintance had arrived, as well as four English ladies travelling together, and a rather solemn-looking youth

who was returning from a protracted tour in the East.

That evening we all sat round the fire ; and whether for my benefit or from pure mischief, my new friend absolutely scintillated with his " elsewhere truths."

The company was spellbound ; until as he was picturing some impossibly radiant place, the stolid youth gasped out : " Where did you say ? "

" In Siam, of course," replied the Yankee imperturbably. " Don't you recollect it ? "

" Not exactly," stammered the Englishman.

" Ah ! " with inconsequent compassion, " then perhaps you don't keep a journal, and didn't master the language."

And the others looked superciliously at that abashed stripling, as if to say : " Yes, he is an idle and ignorant person, indeed ! "

Before long my friend had transported us to Seville ; and to illustrate the *necessity* of the guitar among Spaniards, he told us in the course of his anecdote how " after the dinner I was beginning to recount my day's wanderings through the wonders of their

city, when the eldest son arose and fetched a guitar, which he handed to me with these words : ‘ Sing your adventures to this, O stranger, they will sound better so ! ’ ”

But shortly afterwards, when he was enlarging upon a palace of ivory somewhere or other, that solemn youth reappeared with a battered old post-horn ; and as he respectfully laid it across the knees of the narrator, he murmured : “ Proclaim your adventures with this, O stranger, they will sound better so ! ”

KAIRWAN

N

KAIRWAN

“**I** CONFESS that I do not appreciate the slumbering ocean, at any rate when it breathes so heavily ! ” Such was my comment to the captain as, after a night of ground-swell, we stood on the deck of the Italian boat, watching the gradual aggrandizement of Suza, fair herself as the dawn, with the moon like an aureole hanging heavily behind her white minarets.

Down rattled the anchor ; and a skiff came alongside, to which I committed myself. The moment it touched the shore, two young fellows seized my bag at different ends, and eventually fought for it. This fighting among the natives is of curious procedure, and seemingly one of infinite possibilities to the thoughtful ; for its ritual consists in each one tearing up and spoiling his own clothes.

I was bound on a pilgrimage to Kairwan,

the safest and the most accessible of the sacrosanct cities of Mahommedanism ; but on enquiry at the hotel I learned that the tram (locally known as " la plate-forme ") went there only once a week, and that it started in connection with the *French* boat ; so I had to conclude the hire of a private carriage. During its equipment I strolled along the shore of the bay, where the sea lay glistening like opals in a setting of dull gold. Did primitive life do well, in arising from the sea and migrating inland ? I took a sip of the sea-water, and still felt uncertain about the answer.

From the porch of the hotel I made a magnificent start with four horses abreast, harnessed to a sort of brougham, which, however, before long began to disintegrate ; but as it seemed only to lose its ornamental parts (now a window, then a door), we were able to proceed in some sort of safety.

On our road we were passing a very black Black, who looked tired, so I gave him a lift as he said that he also was bound for the holy city ; and on the morrow I had practical proof that even blackness is only

skin-deep, for he waited an hour outside my lodging merely to reiterate his gratitude.

We passed at first through groves of dusty olives, which looked as if, tired of comparing their diffident silver with the blatant sand, they had lapsed into the oblivion of disgust. Then we crossed a hideous plain unrelieved by anything except an occasional camel, which now, for the first time in memory, became by contrast endowed with an uncouth comeliness. There was a curious resemblance between these camels and their masters—the same impassivity, the same lower lip, the same inward kink at the hock. I have become possessed of a biting form of reproach, used by the Arab to his camel, something that impeaches the behaviour of her maternal aunts for three generations: it is—but no, I will emulate the silence of the victim, a silence almost religiously impressive, in the mouth of an insulted female!

My driver pointed out to me some robbers, but they were distinctly below the standard; in fact, we escaped molestation of any sort, except from a small sparrow-like bird whose

prejudices we must have unwittingly offended, for it dashed at us with extreme violence.

The track was all the way bad ; but we coped with it at a gallop—over it, through it, and seemingly at times under it—for five hours. Like dice were my bag and myself rattled, before the final shake-out on the doorstep of the squalid, provisionless “ Hôtel de l’Europe,” just at the gate of Kairwan.

On the advice of my host I did not venture within the city walls that evening, but instead I wandered away towards a solitary mound that seemed to beckon. In my path there lay a dead donkey, which is proverbially stated to be a contradiction in terms. But somehow this one seemed real, and very pathetic ; and as I passed him by, the words kept ringing in my ears, “ where the weary are at rest.” Yes ! poor brute, wherever you had gone I hoped it was to a rest—an Arab donkey at rest ! The happiness of suchlike in this world is confined to the few seconds a day that they can snatch for a roll—but during the process heaven itself is in their eyes ; and by the same law

of compensation, the more degraded the beast, the more itching the skin, and consequently the more exquisite his enjoyment of this one relaxation.

I gained my hillock ; from which I watched the blossoming of evening around this spotless city of pure domes—the blues of the nearer atmosphere shading to slate-colour on the horizon, where sky and plain were united by bands of pink and orange, in the presence of a congregation of salmon-breasted clouds.

In the morning, I received the permit of the French consul to view the mosques, and he sent one of his own men to accompany me ; with whom I walked through dirty streets and dirtier lanes, gazing with reverence at the heavy doors and the intricate lattice-work that never, never shall reveal.

I was shown a huge basin, 150 yards in diameter, with a chamber as its centre to which the sultan used to be rowed in a boat—no need of boat any more, for all was dry and dusty as a threshing-floor. We inspected the tombs of many Saints on the way to the sacred well of El Barota,

where the camels that drew the water were walking upstairs to the first landing, as if no drawing-room could be complete without them : where also the narrowness of the stairway, and the adroitness of the animals in minimizing themselves, caused me to feel more hopeful about that famous problem which connects them with the eye of a needle.

The great mosque of Sidi Okba I found to be a building impressive in both size and sentiment, despite its want of height ; and despite the transgressions of the white-washer, who, not content with hiding the beautiful stonework, had splashed and spotted even the marble columns, in some cases effacing the capitals with his pharisaic compound. The prayer-chamber is immense in size, and it may well have been the original inspiration for the mosque at Cordova : it is divided into seventeen aisles by more than three hundred superb columns which, like those in St. Mark's at Venice, have been plundered from older buildings. Set up in the midst are two pillars, between which it is impossible for any sinner to pass !

I was anxious to put my own status to the test, but this was not allowed—another unfortunate one condemned without trial.

Formerly five hundred sages used to teach simultaneously in the mosque ; but at the time of my visit there was only one of them to the fore, and he was instructing some small boys, who were playing high-jinks with the Koran, reciting its sober precepts in tones and inflections appropriate only to a nursery rhyme.

How like is this Mahommedanism to the Dissenting faiths of England—in its contempt for the quality of awe, in its abhorrence of imagery, in its intolerance, in its squaring of virtue with desire ! A splendidly virile religion no doubt, but, like the rest of the Semitic group, instinct with oppression, war, bloodshed !

I was to leave Kairwan by the tram ; so at six o'clock next morning I hurried through the drizzle and the darkness to its starting-place, to find—certainly the car, an antique vehicle devoid of anything save the framework, which was adapted to the narrowest of gauges. But there was no sign of a

departure even in contemplation, unless it were the presence of three solemn Arabs, looking as if they were the efflorescence of those gaunt benches, as they squatted with not a leg visible and nothing to encourage belief that they had ever been endowed with motive action. Half an hour passed, and still no sign, except that two or three more travellers had trickled to the spot. Suddenly a throbbing tumult, as of distant drums, became audible, and folk stared at one another apprehensively and whispered, "the river?" At this crisis, one of the passengers extricated his valise from under the seat, and retired to his home, saying resignedly: "The platform will not get to Suza to-day. I have heard that sound before, the embankment has given way." Imagine the general consternation at a man of evident experience going home for another week, because he bowed before the inevitable!

At this juncture, however, while the survivors (if I may so call them) were staring blankly at one another, two ragged-hipped mules lounged into view, followed by two

attendants, and amid novel excitements the past was forgotten. For, when the traces were fastened, neither mule would stir a step, so we all got out again to lighten the machine, returning to it by more or less successful headers when the pair rushed suddenly, and violently, forward. The pace was terrific for about a hundred yards, and then another long pause. A man fetched the leaf of a neighbouring cactus to apply as a plaster to the "white one" which was so free with its heels; but meantime the maledictions of the united company, reinforced by all available sticks and umbrellas, had induced these interesting creatures to reconsider their strategy, during which time of truce they tolerated propulsion in front of the car by a band of natives shoving behind it, and eventually even consented to a temporary resumption of normal function.

Just, however, as we were congratulating ourselves, there was one more abrupt stop accompanied this time by a sullen splash; and behold! there wallowed both our mules in a swamp by the side of the track, their

heads alone visible. With a promptitude evidently born of previous experience the conductor, when he had detached the traces from their swingle-bars, sprang after the bathers, and ladled water into those expansive ears, a course of action that was instantaneously effective. But afterwards, till we had escaped from the marshes, the white mule, in deep disgrace, was tied at the rear of the car, and we certainly progressed with more regularity, drawn by the brown one alone.

Our adventures for the day were over ; and falsifying all evil predictions, when we reached the river we passed over and not into it !

THE TREE OF LIFE

THE TREE OF LIFE

WHILE it was yet spring—while the world was full of the morning—while youth surged through me, a flame flickering, from its very intensity, like the wings of a seraph—while all was sunlit, morrowless emotion—I was first told of the Buddha, of his rule. And I was so captivated by the idea that in my eagerness I could not wait to consider, I must become his pupil from that very day !

Having the will—success was assured to me ! My predilections during my previous career had been quite definite and well marked : they could, therefore, be stamped out at my pleasure. Everything seemed to come to me naturally. This new teacher had declared that the future depended on one's own efforts, not on prayers to a whimsical deity that needed coaxing ; and the diamonds on the Path only sparkled,

they did not cut my nimble feet—at first. It was all to be so delightfully easy.

But, ah, me ! success along that path is not possible for a spirit that is immature : in the flowery meadows such a one should be still playing, heedless of the future, as long as he can be happy there. So, of course, I failed ; and my failure was heralded by the usual questions and doubts and excuses, which in my case finally unified into the demand for some hypothesis capable of suggesting why an individual soul should emanate from the universal, incorporate itself with matter, and undergo cycles of painful wanderings—only in the end to win back its original status by reabsorption.

Now the Buddha had always refused absolutely to discuss mysteries, because their reality transcended the thought of untrained humanity—because they could only be solved by each one for himself, through the gradual expansion of consciousness. “ Measure not with words Th’ Immeasurable ; nor sink the string of thought Into the Fathomless. Who asks doth err, Who answers errs.”

And so I sorrowfully turned away to collect ready-made information from other sources, for it would be illogical to accept a religion not based on certainty, especially if it involved considerable sacrifice and discomfort !

After this, I began to fancy that the anthropomorphism of the Semitic religions must have more common sense at its earth-imbedded roots than the transcendentalists would allow ; and that, confused by the vastness of Reality, it might be well to narrow one's vision till by concentration one could apprehend at any rate a little, could throw some sort of figure on to the blank of one's mind. I would imitate the astronomers in darkening my glasses before I tried to gaze at the sun. In this frame of mind I started my search after the Tree of Life, whose faint radiance seemed to soften even the prosaic dogmas of Judaism, and the crude blacks-and-whites of ecclesiastical Christianity.

But in the Holy Canon information proved to be scanty indeed ! According to the Book of Genesis, Jehovah never once men-

tioned the Tree of Life to Adam and Eve ; and even after their eyes were opened they could have had but a hazy notion of its virtues, although the Lord God, as soon as he perceived that man was " become as one of us," hasted to place him beyond the possibility of gaining eternal life. Again, the legend in its development tended to create a pessimistic bias in the most sanguine seeker, for its alternatives seemed to be either possession of the Garden in ignorant innocence, or automatic banishment at the birth of consciousness ; while it was out of the question to win access to the Tree by stratagem, in opposition to a forewarned deity assisted in his defence by cherubim, specially told off, and by a flashing sword which turned every way.

Nevertheless these difficulties did not make one whit less contemptible the antics of that crowd of the conventional from every sect in Christendom, which continued to sprawl in front of the well-guarded portal of paradise, bewailing and imploring. Imploring Jehovah for what ? To reverse, forsooth, his own policy by granting them facilities to visit

that very tree, the protection of which caused him in the first instance to expel them from the garden. No impartial intelligence could doubt the unfitness of such as these to become "as gods," these lazy ones with their invertebrate supplications!

After the close of the Edenic story, the beautiful simile of the Tree of Life died out from the pages of the Bible, except for two unintelligible passages at the end of the Apocalypse. I found, however, a saying of Christ, quoted in all the synoptics, which appeared to refer to the same idea: "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." But this was counsel more epigrammatic than practical; as from it I could extract no hint of *how* to lose my life for his sake. To lay down this earthly existence would be useless, for it was impossible to prevent rebirth. Clearly death was but a temporary repose; and not until I had found Wisdom should I be entitled to the privilege of getting rid of myself, of arriving at communion with the Life Eternal—the Life Universal. Moses, Jesus, St. John—and none would

help—they gave but words and mocking subtleties !

Chagrined and cast down, I began by chance to study, in the rudiments of astronomy, the material wonders of the universe. I was amazed at the immensities of interstellar space, so far beyond the power of figures that they had to be computed in "years of light," of light that travelled with a swiftness of nearly 200,000 miles a second. I read of stars, from which each ray of this light took 5000 years to reach our world—so that after the destruction of such a star, for 5000 years would its unaltered radiance in our skies preserve the secret of a sublime non-existence. I read that in reality these stars were suns, each one probably surrounded by satellites like those of our own sun, which in its own insignificant system ruled a planet at a distance of 2800 million miles. I read that each successive improvement in our telescopes had revealed myriads of stars previously invisible, and that the universe was to the best of our understanding limitless and eternal.

From these preliminaries, I soon perceived that my mind was incapable of assimilating all of man's discoveries on this plane, and that in my brain bewilderment often dethroned admiration. But if my imagination were thus staggered by the physical aspect of a mere fragment of cosmos, how could it be expected to apprehend the totality of the First Cause? In that hour of reflection I learned a much-needed lesson in proportional values—the relation of the universe to the solar system, of the solar system to the earth, of the earth to mankind, of mankind to myself: after which, braced with these certainties, my new life dawned full of contentment and a sweet philosophy.

Thus I came to perceive that neither the Buddha, nor the Christ, could tell the world that which he knew, any more than can the men of to-day who are with God, who are God—the men who have attained. For these perfect ones have entered into Reality, and they no longer belong to this hectic life-dream of ours, though they may outwardly conform to its usages. No one of experience has ever spoken, or ever will

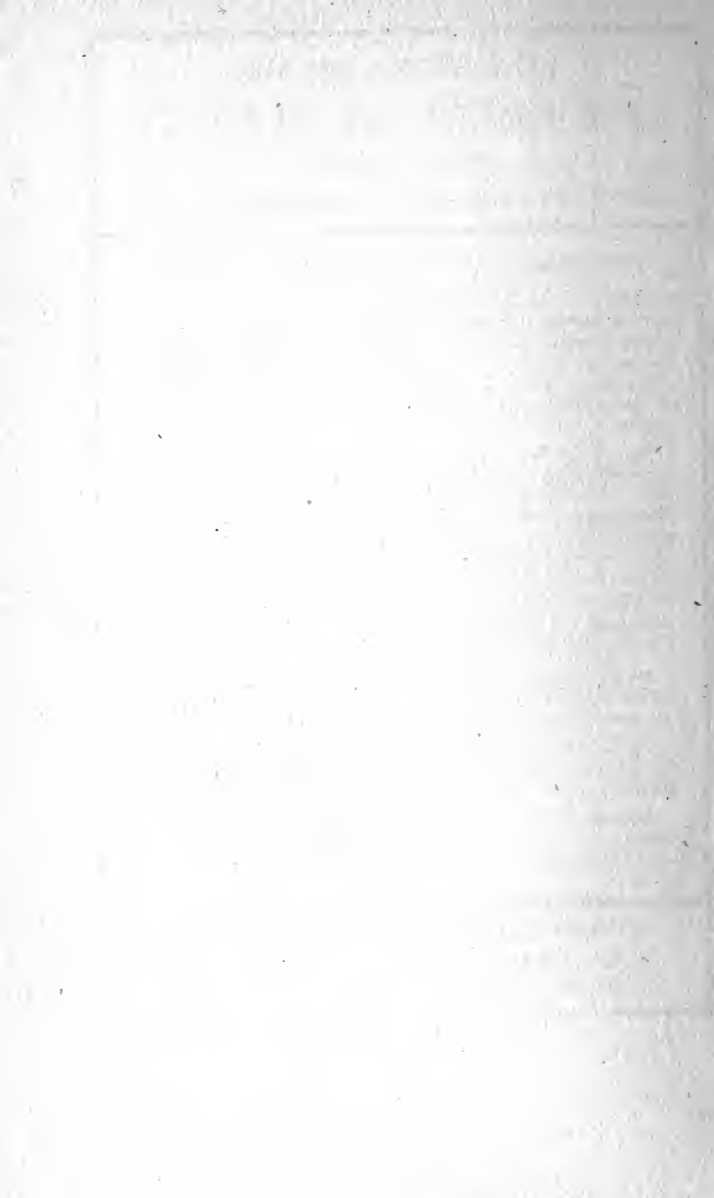
do so, for language is impotent to clothe the mystery ; but the neophyte is only following a natural sequence in theorizing, then in dreaming—before he in his turn becomes silent. To-day, therefore, we can many of us guess—you can guess, I can guess—but we cannot apprehend, that the perception of unity may be the grace that is symbolized by the fruit of the Tree of Life.

Sometimes, however, during the present stage of evolution, we all are conscious of a strange power within us ; and whoever has once vibrated to the beauty of an abstraction, may know that he possesses a soul, possesses God in embryo. And this stirring, this quickening of the divine that is dormant in each of us, is the faint prelude to that great awakening in the future when, the dreamland of desire having melted away, we shall find to our amazement the Tree of Life, for which we have been searching far and wide, to be rooted in our own souls.

Then also shall we realize that, although by means of the Tree of Knowledge mankind may have achieved some equality with elementals and tutelary deities, it is beyond

the realm of Dagon, beyond the realm of bright Baal, beyond even the realm of Jehovah that the fruit is hanging which mellows only in the presence of the Absolute.

THE END



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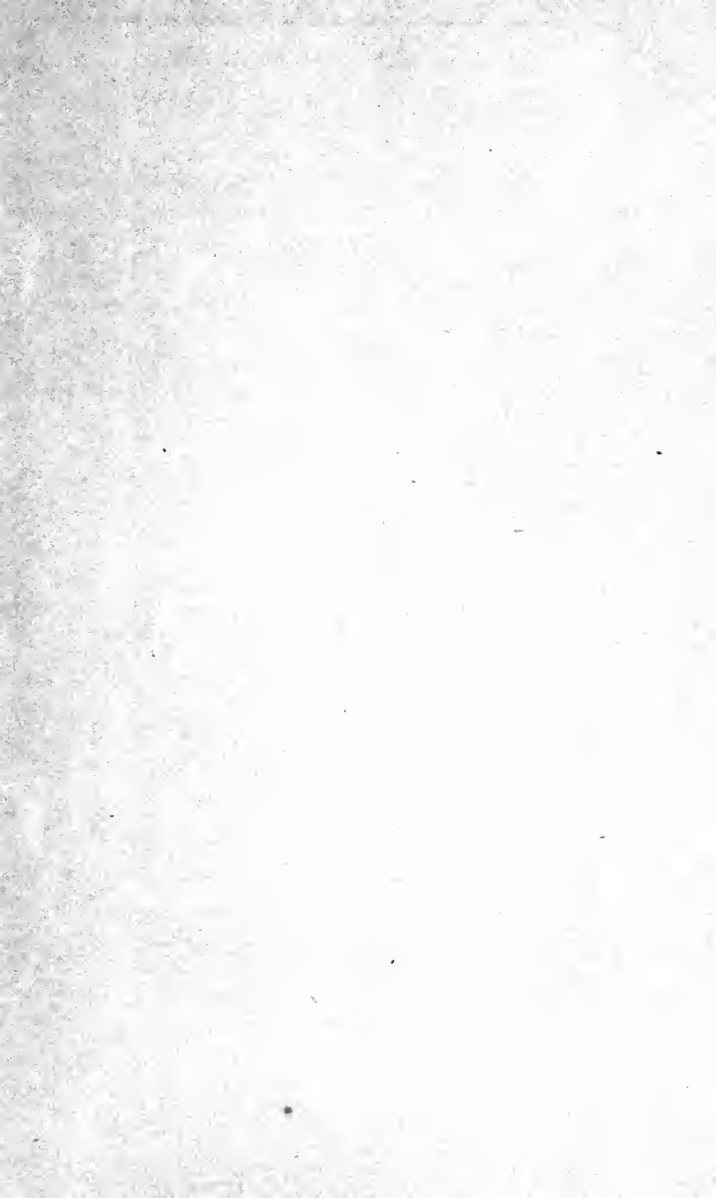
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